Night Shift

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by PossessiveNoun

Summary

There are certain rules to follow when working for Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane. Under no circumstances are you to engage any of the inmates in personal conversation, put yourself in a position where they can cause you serious injury, or let them get inside your head.

Despite Will Graham's best efforts he has managed to ignore all the rules as the new Orderly at the hospital and found himself the centre of fascination for the worst of the inmates, the Cannibal known as Hannibal Lecter.

~

Will smiled a humorless smile. "Are you trying to psychoanalyse me Doctor? Are you missing the good old days of psychiatry?"

Hannibal gripped the bars of the cell, fingers tightening like he wanted to prise them apart to be on the same side as Will. "I want to know you, Will. Don't you want to know me too?"

Will swallowed down the spike of fear at his words. "No. I don't find you all that interesting."

Hannibal's answering smile was all teeth. "You will."

Notes

Hey guys,just a couple things to note. I have never been in an institution in a working capacity or as a client. I have very little information on how it works, but i hope it won't be too unrealistic for you. Also, i have some characters in here from Silence of the lambs which i enjoy from Thomas Harris's books, but it won't be confusing to those who haven't read the books.

Chapter One

An Orderly at Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane hadn't been Will Graham's job of choice, not by a long shot. An Institute of sterile corridors smelling overwhelmingly of Lysol, the slamming of barred heavy duty doors and so-called Doctors picking apart a man's brain until all that he was is laid bare filled Will with a foreboding feeling. There could come a day where Will would walk through the Asylum's doors and never be allowed out again.

Not an irrational fear, when Will falls on the Autism spectrum with the dangerous slip-slide of empathy into madness.

His medical and psychological file made it nigh impossible to be hired in a seemingly endless ocean of jobs. His anti social personality, an aversion to eye contact and discomfort of physical closeness to people, made him difficult to get along with and undesirable to an employer who demand perfection for the going wage of peanuts. For the first six months, Will participated in the circus of job interview after job interview, getting fed the line of 'Unsuitable for this company, good luck in your future endeavors', with a smile barely concealed insincerity as they slide Will's CV back to him. 'Unsuitable' was corporate talk for rejection of those with mental health issues, the thinnest of veneers that allowed them to skim over the laws that were meant to protect people like Will.

And yet his unsuitability for jobs were what made him perfect for the Baltimore State Hospital. The irony was almost funny if it wasn't so depressing.

Will had been browsing the job section of the local newspaper in a roadside diner, with a stone cold cup of coffee at his elbow and a resentful waitress glaring at him from her perch at the cash register. Will's funds had been dwindling since his last temporary job he was able to keep and he had taken advantage of the warmth of the Diner, counting out the change from his coat pocket to pay for the coffee so he had a reason to be there. The waitress's opinion of him had taken a nose dive since then.

With the newspaper spread out in front of him, Will studiously ignored her gaze and perused the vacancy section with dwindling enthusiasm until the very small advert for the orderly position caught his eye. It was vague at best, practically buried by those surrounding it. It boasted only a few lines, comprising of title, hours, annual salary with the magical words to all job seekers 'No experience necessary- on job training'.

Will only hesitated briefly. There comes a certain desperation when your gas and electrical supplier turns it off to your house and you've been subsisting on convenience store factory packed sandwiches because you couldn't afford anything else. It brings a certain clarity to the saying 'beggars can't be choosers'.

With that in mind, Will applied the next day and within a fortnight he attended a rudimentary interview by the senior Orderly by the name of Barney Matthews and he was hired for the Night shift.

Dr Frederick Chilton was the head of the Institute and gave Will what could only be a well rehearsed welcome speech that consisted of various levels of scare mongering and intimidation tactics. Will got the distinct impression the man enjoyed the thoroughfare of it all.

Chilton sat behind a wide ostentatious desk, his name plate made in cursive gold lettering. "I'm sure Barney has gone through the wards protocol with you?"

"He was very thorough, Sir," Will replied.

"Yes, quite." Chilton said mildly. "Barney's a good man, but I suspect he hasn't impressed upon you the very serious danger the inmates pose to you and those around them. It's something that shouldn't be taken lightly. You'll be working with them, after all."

Chilton watched him avidly, as if hoping for a reaction that meant Will would balk at the task. Will kept his face carefully blank. "I understand that. The rules speak for themselves. All inmates are to be treated with the utmost caution. Doors remain locked, no personal conversations with them, keep them at a physical distance, nothing sharp can be passed to them to serve as a weapon on harm themselves-"

“Yes, yes, all of that,” Chilton said impatiently. “Don’t deviate from it. *Do not deviate from it for any reason* . Especially when dealing with Hannibal Lecter, our resident cannibal. You’ve heard of him, haven’t you?”

Even before coming to the Hospital, Will had heard of Hannibal Lecter, the psychiatrist who cannibalised parts of his victims and made a macabre picture of them for the FBI to find.

He was all over the news three years ago, they called him the Chesapeake ripper before they coined ‘Hannibal the cannibal’. He was a sensation, a man of education and taste, but with the penchant for murder. Doctors of the highest field wrote numerous articles about him, ordinary people enjoyed the scintillating details. There wasn’t a news outlet that didn’t splash Lecter’s face on every television for the world to see.

“I have read about him,” Will said finally.

Chilton smiled without any real humour. “Hannibal Lecter is our most dangerous criminal. He gutted Jack Crawford, the man famed for his capture with a linoleum knife. It’s a wonder Jack didn’t die. Hannibal didn’t count on the man’s tenacity, that’s for certain.”

“It’s probably best that Hannibal no longer has access to linoleum knives then,” Will said for want of anything better to say.

Chilton didn’t appreciate the joke. “You may laugh, Mr. Graham, but just because Hannibal Lecter is now behind bars, it doesn’t make him safe. The previous Administration to this Hospital soon learnt *that* lesson. He fooled everyone the first year he was committed here, a model of cooperation. Security around him was allowed to relax.” Chilton’s disgusted tone of voice told Will what he thought of that. “One afternoon he complained of chest pains and he was taken to the dispensary. His restraints were removed to make it easier to give him an electrocardiogram. When the nurse bent over him, he dropped the civilised person suit. Doctors were able to save one of her eyes. Lecter was hooked up to the monitors the entire time. He broke her jaw to get at her tongue. His pulse never got over eighty five, even when he swallowed it.”

Will remained silent. There was nothing he could add to that.

Chilton leaned forward, delighted that he now had Will's full attention. "Do your job, just don't ever forget what he really is."

Will licked his dry lips. "And what is that exactly?"

"A pure sociopath, no doubt about it." Chilton answered. "But he's impenetrable, much too sophisticated for the standard tests. Like most sociopaths, he operates under a guise of charm and affability. He can manipulate you into telling him everything about you without you even knowing he's doing it. If he tries to talk to you, which he might, do not engage him. You may be the shiny new thing in here, but he's only taking an interest so that he can play his mind games with you. I'm sure I don't have to reiterate how badly that would go for you with all that I have told you, do I?"

"That's not necessary, no," Will said mildly, mind turning over everything.

Chilton smirked, leaning back in his seat like the cat that caught the canary. "I thought so. Welcome to Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane, Mr Graham. I hope that you will be very content working with us."

Mere minutes of being in Barney's company, Will could tell they would get along just fine. The senior Orderly was a big man, standing at well over six feet and broad in the shoulder and arms. He dwarfed Will and normally Will would have been intimidated by the man, but he was soft spoken and courteous from the moment they met. H didn't have the need to fill silences up with inane small talk, didn't force eye contact with Will or act offended by Will's abrupt mannerisms. He took it all in his stride, like everything was as it should be. It was a refreshing change of pace.

They both now stood in the observation room just off of the ward where a series of screens lined one wall, displaying various angles of CCTV footage of different corridors and cells. Towards the back of the room was a large mesh cabinet that housed cans of mace spray and

restraints in various sizes and shapes. At the top hung a long metal pole with a V at the end of it, all the better to pin a violent inmate to the wall with.

Will eyed it all wearily and Barney caught the look. “Certain inmates like to test the boundaries of authority by acting up. We have to take a zero tolerance policy on such behaviour or they will overrun us. In time, you’ll get used to how things work here.” He shrugged his shoulders. “It will become like second nature.”

Will seriously doubted that but he kept his thoughts to himself. “Would these ‘certain inmates’ also include Hannibal Lecter?”

Barney didn’t show any surprise at Will dropping the man’s name into the conversation. His lips quirked into amusement. “Ah, I see the esteemed Dr Chilton has already regaled you with Dr Lecter’s escapades.”

Will shrugged. “He might have mentioned a thing or two about him.”

Barney grinned. “That, I have no doubt. Chilton is right in the sense that Dr Lecter is a very dangerous man. I don’t think there is a man alive who can forget that in his presence.” Barney considered his next words carefully. “You have to understand that there is a certain way in dealing with Hannibal Lecter. He is severely disdainful of rude people, of disrespect shown to him. You treat Lecter with politeness, of respect that an educated man deserves and he won’t give you too much trouble. Keep yourself to yourself and no heart-to-heart talks with him and you’ll do just fine.”

“And the nurse? What did she do that Lecter considered so disdainful?” Will asked, unable to refrain from curiosity.

Barney shrugged again in a self deprecating gesture as he fished out a pile of letters from the cubbyholes that ll had names on each of them. “That I don’t know. Maybe she didn’t talk to him right, maybe she didn’t talk to him at all, I can’t say for sure. To Dr Lecter it made perfect sense. I’m not saying that all you have to do is be the picture of politeness and he’ll leave you alone, it's not that easy. But it does go a long way with him. Come on, I have to give him his mail. I’ll introduce you at the same time, make sure you get off on the right foot.”

Will couldn't say no, this was now part of his job and they would have to meet at some point. Having Barney there could only make matters easier.

Will followed Barney out of the observation room and down a long green corridor with its lysol smell and the distant slamming of barred doors. This was part of the Hospital where there was no natural light from any windows, the fluorescent lights in metal grids overhead making his eyes squint at their harsh light.

The ward was secured by three barred doors, each having a separate key to open them, all hanging from Barney's huge ring of keys at his belt. "Copies will be made for you," Barney assured Will as they got through the third and final door.

They were finally on the ward for the most dangerous of inmates, a long stretch of corridor with about six cells on each side. Some were padded cells, a reinforced door with a small narrow window like an archery gap. Others were barred like the usual prison affair, with narrow beds and a squat toilet. Will didn't let his eyes linger on the dark shapes of the occupants of the cells, concentrating instead on Barney's broad back as the man led him to the very last cell on the left, facing nothing more than a cleaning closet.

As Will passed Lecter's neighbour, the man's filthy hands gripped the bars and pressed his manically grinning face to the space between the bars and hissed, "Bet you scream real good."

"Shut it, Miggs," Barney snapped as the grinning man, Miggs, retreated to his bed whilst giggling.

They stopped at Lecter's cell, a good distance away from the bars, the squeak of their standard issue rubber soled shoes announcing their presence ahead of them.

Will was surprised to see that Lecter's cell had more in it than the others they had passed. He had a tiny desk pushed against the opposite wall of his bed, what looked like loose sketching paper with markers neatly set next to each other. Beautiful artwork was pinned to the bare walls, detailed scenes of what Will presumed were European cities judging by the distinctive architecture.

Standing in the middle of the room with his back to them was Hannibal Lecter. He wore the light coloured jumpsuit with his inmate number stamped on the back in black numbers. He appeared tall, taller than Will by a head, with short dark hair that was longer than the typical buzz cut other inmates had. He was broad shouldered and slim; a State Hospital not conducive to anyone fat despite the lack of exercise.

"I have your mail here for you, Dr Lecter," Barney said. "Correspondence from a Dr Du Maurier and your subscription to that psychology journal you like."

"Thank you Barney," came Hannibal's soft cultured voice. It had a metallic rasp beneath it Will suspected it was from disuse. Barney pulled out a metal drawer in the cell door and slipped the mail in before closing it and pushing it through to Hannibal's side.

Hannibal finally turned and faced them and Will was arrested by the sight. With such a reputation as a cannibalistic serial killer, there is a part of the human psyche that expects such a person to be ugly. Perhaps it's because people expect a face to match the crime. It's always a surprise when the face is revealed to be attractive.

Hannibal wasn't attractive in the classical sense, but his features were striking with his strong jawline, straight nose, thin lips and eyes that were dark and they reflected the fluorescent light like pinpricks of red.

Hannibal glided forward and stopped a good away from the bars, staring at Will. He seemed to take in every detail from the toes of Will's boots to the unruly curls on his head, filing away every detail. It was an uncomfortable feeling and yet Will pulse quickened with adrenaline. There was something oddly thrilling to be standing so close to someone that was so dangerous, separated only by bars of metal.

Will had almost forgotten Barney was standing beside him until the man spoke again. "Dr Lecter, i'd like to introduce to you Will, the new staff member on our team."

Hannibal never took his eyes from Will's face at Barney's introduction. "It's a pleasure to meet you, Will."

Will couldn't say the feeling was mutual so he nodded his head with a soft, "Dr Lecter."

Hannibal didn't exactly smile, his lips barely moved, but there was an expression in his eyes that made Will feel like he was… not amused exactly. Maybe delight was more fitting.

Barney carried on talking. "He'll be on the night rotation, dealing more with security and the smooth running of the ward than with your day duties. I doubt you'll see much of each other but I thought I should introduce you anyway."

Hannibal's nostrils flared as if he was scenting the air. "Is that so? You will soon find out, Will, that the nights in such a place as this are hardly sedate as i'm sure you are used to. Perhaps we will see more of each other than dear Barney believes."

That felt like a promise. "I guess we will see."

"I'm sure."

Barney led the way back down the corridor and Will couldn't resist the temptation to look back despite the warning alarm ringing inside his head. He found Hannibal was watching him in turn.

Chapter 2

The Baltimore State Asylum had the disquieting feeling of making time stand still inside its walls. Days blended into nights, hours stretching into seemingly nothingness, and only the ticking of the clock reassured Will that life was in motion.

Will had been an orderly for three weeks and two days, but it felt like a lifetime of monitoring patient behaviour and staring blankly at the four walls around him. Three weeks of twelve hour shifts where Will administers prescriptive drugs, with or without the restraints, maintain peace and order on the ward, walk rounds with Barney in the mornings before shift change when needed and on occasion do a shakedown of the inmate's cells for weapons and restricted items.

But more often than not, Will would be staring at the CCTV monitors with glazed eyes and counting the steady ticks of the clock. It felt like his whole life was being formed around the sound.

If Will felt like a sail boat cast adrift on an endless ocean, he couldn't imagine how the inmates felt in their tiny cramped cells. He watched with a growing fascination as some paced the length of the floor afforded to them, like caged wild animals, in some macabre zoo of unfortunates. Most of them slept the night shift by natural means or by the blissful chemical oblivion of a sedative, twitching and thrashing in their dreams, calling out to someone unknown. Being chased by imagined demons, or taunted by the memory of a lost life outside the Asylum's gates.

Some crouched in the corners, muttering to themselves unintelligibly, fingers on the walls as they traced pictures from their minds. Those who could be trusted by the Psychiatrists were allowed to have books to read, something to pass the long march of time, though most only had themselves as company. Dr Chilton was adamant that therapy and self reflection must come above everything else, no matter how long the inmates had been there for.

Whatever therapy the good Doctor was bestowing on the troubled souls, it didn't look like there was any improvement to their behaviour. They often grew restless, and the more restless they were the angrier they got.

This rule, however, didn't seem to extend to Hannibal Lecter, from the look of his cell. All of his reading material, the sketches allowed to stay on the walls, his drawing utensils, he was allowed to keep. It all pointed towards a favoured inmate, a pet of sorts. Will couldn't help but wonder if it was perhaps some sort of bribe from Chilton to the Doctor. To keep him compliant perhaps, to warn against another 'mishap' like what happened to the unfortunate Nurse and her ravaged face. After all, there was nothing worse than having to keep a bored Cannibal from wreaking havoc through the ward and cause a riot.

Of all the inmates, Will watched Hannibal through the monitors the most. At first it was an unconscious habit he picked up, the sketches giving Will's mind something to concentrate on that wouldn't put him to sleep. It was like a game of 'guess the city', he would memorise the skylines and try to pick out recognisable details to identify them. It then evolved to observing the man himself and before long he couldn't look away.

Hannibal was a mesmerizing man to watch. He had an incredible elegance he had in everything he did, no matter how dull the task was. He held himself with a poise that drew the eye to the long line of his body and Will got the odd sensation of being a voyeur, despite it being part of his job description. The cameras were like an invite for closer intimacy of a certain nature, one that made Will shift uneasily in his seat.

Not that Hannibal was ever doing anything untoward to make Will feel uncomfortable. In fact, he was the very picture of an educated man in his leisure time. He seemed to only need a few hours sleep, five at the most, and yet seemed fresh as a daisy.

Will envied him that when the Night Shift made him feel like a zombie.

Hannibal spent his waking hours perusing the many letters he got, drawing his landscapes and keeping as fit as a man could with such little floor space. He peeled off the jumpsuit to the waist, tying the arms around his hips to keep it from slipping any further, before he began doing a dizzying amount of push ups.

The muscles beneath his sweating skin bunched and smoothed rhythmically with the motion and, well. It was at this precise moment that Will found something very interesting with the scuffed floor beneath Will's feet. If he looked closely enough, he could make out shapes of the black marks.

Not once did Hannibal glance at the video camera or take any sort of notice of it, but Will couldn't help but wonder....

Which was completely ridiculous, really. Hannibal was being Hannibal, he had no need for posturing to an orderly he had seen the one time. It didn't make any sense.

"He acts like it's a leisure resort," Matthew Brown, another Orderly assigned to the Night Shift, said beside Will with a derisive snort. "You wouldn't think he was here because he murdered a bunch of people."

Will shrugged, before adding nonchalantly, "Dr Chilton seems awfully indulgent with Lecter's hobbies."

Matthew grinned, showing off straight white teeth. Will guessed he was a man in his thirties, with handsome boyish features that made him look younger. He had a restless energy thrumming just beneath his skin like kinetic energy. He was an expressive talker, gesticulating with his long fingered hands often, an endless fountain of miscellaneous information. Will didn't mind it, it meant he didn't have to scramble for small talk to fill in the painful silences. Matthew took care of that.

He was generous with the information now. "Chilton is trying to get on Lecter's good side so he can fleece Lecter for all of the details of the murders that Chilton needs for his book."

Will glanced at him, frowning. "What book?"

Despite no one else being in the observation room with them, Matthew leant forward into Will's space, like he was imparting a sordid secret. Will quelled the urge to flinch away from him. "The good Doctor wants to publish a book about Hannibal the Cannibal, all of his diagnosis and observations on him. He plans to call it Blood and chocolate."

Will glanced back at the monitor thoughtfully. "I can't imagine Hannibal giving someone like Chilton any room into his brain. From what others have told me, Lecter despises Chilton."

Matthew didn't move away, content with what little space was between them. "Hannibal has never made his feelings a secret when it comes to Chilton. But he has the rest of his life to rot away in that cell. Hannibal knows this, can't escape from it, and one day Chilton will offer something his cannibal heart won't be able to refuse."

Will shivered, mind shying away from what a man like Hannibal Lecter would want and what a man like Chilton would give in exchange for such information. The book would probably be an instant success in the educated circles, and Chilton had that hungry look for recognition and fame.

Hannibal had now finished his push ups and was at the sink, washing the sweat from his face and neck, body bent over to get at the heated skin. His shoulder blades flexed with the movements and Will could easily picture the strength that was needed to kill another person.

Matthew breathed out noisily, the *whuff* of air fanning across Will's cheek before he finally pulled away and checked the clock. "Alright, it's nearly seven AM, an hour before shift change. Time to wake the lazy bastards for breakfast."

Will grunted in agreement and Matthew turned around to the control port by the monitors and flicked a series of switches. The overhead lights in the ward that were giving out a dim glow suddenly brightened to their usual brightness.

Will didn't need the sound of the CCTV footage to know a good number of inmates were shouting curses that would have turned the air blue. He couldn't blame them, seven in the morning was a cruel time to be woken when all you had to look forward to in the day was a psychiatrist's benign face and endless questions about why you plunged a knife into your wife's throat to blame it on demonic influences in your head.

Dr Chilton kept a strict regimen for all of his inmates. Seven AM wake up for a meager breakfast with colourful pills to choke down their throats, followed by daily therapy sessions, a bland lunch, exercise and fresh air for one hour in fenced off areas, an even blander dinner and then lights out at ten PM. Repeat on days that end in y.

If they weren't already insane when they were first incarcerated, they would be by the end of the month.

Breakfast was delivered by one of the catering staff on a metal trolley, always accompanied by an orderly for their safety. It was pushed through the cell box once the inmate was ordered to stand with his back to the opposite wall.

Will warily watched as Abel Gideon complied with Will's order and the server stepped forward with a bowl of runny porridge and a cup of water. Gideon was a short unassuming man that would offer one hand in friendship while the other held a knife at your throat.

He stared at Will with a funny little half smile that kicked up Will's heartbeat. "Good morning, Will. I do hope the night was as restful for you as it was for me."

"It was uneventful, if that is what you mean," Will said, keeping Gideon's hands in his line of sight without being obvious about it.

Gideon's smile grew wider. "What, no restraining a sassy inmate to the wall for disobedience?" His light eyes trailed down Will's body to linger on the baton secured at Will's waist. "Perhaps you got in a few blows with that stick of yours? Made them really feel it come the morning."

He made the words sound obscene in that context, the insinuation vulgar to even think about. Will could only ignore it and Gideon laughed into the ensuing silence.

The server slid the box with the food through to Gideon's side and hastened back to the trolley, his eyes flickering up to meet Will's quickly in a shared grimace before they moved on to the next cell.

The other inmates barely acknowledged them, eyes only for the food, save for Multiple Miggs who felt the overwhelming need to be his crude self and tell them in detail about the first bowel movement he had of the day.

The last to get his breakfast was Lecter and he stood with his back to the wall without having to be asked by Will. The server's shoulders were hunched in on themselves, his head down so

his blonde fringe hid his eyes as he pulled the tray out with the water from the trolley. The water sloshed slightly over the rim of the cup and Will realised that the man was shaking slightly from fear.

It seems even the catering staff weren't immune to the reputation of such a man.

Will wasn't completely unaffected by it either. Hannibal had a stillness to him that was almost inhuman. He seemed to have a way of staring at everything like he was observing human behaviour from a purely detached professional point of view.

He inclined his head towards Will. "It is unfortunate that Abel Gideon feels the need to vulgarise your place with us, Will. I hope it won't reflect badly on the rest of us here."

As if the criminally insane have the reputation of being the very picture of good manners-

It took a moment for Will to realise that Hannibal was actually teasing him, he spoke with such mildness that Will had almost missed it.

"It comes with the job," Will answered carefully. "I'm getting used to it."

"It is unconscionable that you have to get used to it in the first place," Hannibal said as he watched the server slide the food through to him in the box and making a messy job of it.

The words were out of Will's mouth before he could stop himself. "Does playing the courteous civilised man work for you?"

The server's shoulders hunch further. Will can't help but think the posture must hurt him, before the man turned around and gave him wide panicked eyes. Will couldn't blame him, he wished he could snatch the word out of the air. He had thrown Barney's words of advice right out of the window without a single thought to them.

Hannibal's facial expression didn't change, but his focus seemed to sharpen. Will felt it like it was a palpable thing in the air. Will was locked in that gaze. "Playing, Will?"

Will felt the warning there but once he starts something, it's like nothing can stop him from finishing it. He gestured around him. "You are in this place for dark reason, Dr Lecter. I would say civility does not belong here."

Hannibal's eyebrow rose. "Cannot civility and the violent occupy the same space? Are the good only capable of good deeds and the evil capable of bad deeds? It is a naive viewpoint, one I should think beneath someone like you."

The caterer was now back with the trolley, swaying from one foot to the next in an impatient gesture to get moving, but Will couldn't leave just yet. "Someone like me. What do you mean by that?"

Without permission, Hannibal glided forward, never taking his eyes from Will. "Someone with pure empathy. It's a gift, Will. A painful gift, I can imagine, but a gift nonetheless. With such insight, can you truly look at me and say I am not capable of being civil and meaning it?"

Will felt frozen to the spot, transfixed - in horror, disbelief, uncertain. How did he know, *how could he possibly know-*

"Will," the server said, breaking into his thoughts and drawing his attention to the man. "We need to get going." he said with polite but firm emphasis.

It was the reminder Will needed to remember exactly who he was talking to, someone who relished getting into people's heads and mess them up for his own amusement. Will pulled away from Hannibal, from his gaze and his words and Hannibal just stood there and watched him retreat.

Will followed the server back down the hall with his trolley and out of the barred door with its clanging locks that screamed 'safe'.

So why doesn’t Will safe anymore?

Chapter 3

It had occurred to Will that Hannibal Lecter was purposely baiting him, scattering metaphorical breadcrumbs in a trail that inevitably led to the monster's lair. *His* lair. And that monster was lying in wait, wanting to pique Will's interest by revealing a fact about Will that he should never have known in the first place. He had every intention to lure Will back to -

To do what? What exactly was Hannibal's end game here? Did a serial killer need a reason to target a certain victim, to play with them for their own means? To end the life of another for their own pleasure? Was Hannibal intending to make Will his next victim, to relive the exhilarating rush he gets from hurting others? It had been a while since the incident with the nurse, Hannibal must be *so bored* .

By all right, Will should be running full tilt in the opposite direction. That would have been what a smart man with any self preservation would do in his position. But instead, Will was doing the exact opposite and taking the bait from the serial killer. He was throwing every caution to the wind, every sane thought falling on deaf ears. It caused a rush of adrenaline to shoot through Will's body, made his breath quicken in what could only be attributed to excitement. Interacting with a dangerous man like Hannibal Lecter made Will excited. He didn't want to look too closely at that reaction.

The next night, when Matthew and Barney went to deal with a troublesome inmate on another ward, Will took the opportunity to turn off the recording equipment on the CCTV footage and followed that malevolent bread crumb trail. It came as no surprise that Hannibal seemed to be waiting for him, there was a clear sense of expectation in his face as he turned towards Will.

Will didn't give him a chance to say anything. "How?" He demanded, keeping his voice to an angry hiss so any inquisitive ears on the ward could not hear their conversation. "How could you possible know about my empathy?"

Hannibal had been sitting on his bed with his back to the wall and legs out straight before him in a relaxed pose. A book was open on his lap and he took a moment to finish his paragraph before he shut it with a neat movement. He left it on the bed beside him and stood up to face Will, hands behind him in a relaxed posture. It was like he was displaying himself, wanting Will to watch him. Will got the image of a bird of paradise displaying its plumage, and it only resulted in exasperating Will's impatience even more.

“It is not so difficult to determine your empathy,” Hannibal finally replied. “Your aversion for eye contact, for one.”

“Perhaps i’m just not fond of eye contact,” Will interjected, defensive.

Hannibal ignored the interruption. “People act like there is an invisible barrier around you, an impenetrable silence that i’m sure you have cultivated with utmost diligence. It allows you to mingle in society without the risk of being touched or put a strain on your mental facilities. People like that bumbling fool Doctor Chilton would argue you do it out of the extreme need for isolation, a chronic introvert, but we both know differently. Empathy can make you see the utter depravity that people are capable of. Things that most people would have no one know, not even their loved ones.”

Will didn’t speak, at a loss for words. He just stood there, listening to a man that could dissect his whole world from just observing him for a handful of minutes. There were people that had been in the sphere of Will’s life for years and they had never been able to deduce that much information.

“Do you have a lover, Will?” Hannibal asked without any inflection to his voice,but it still made Will draw in a short breath. “Are they sympathetic to your needs or do you have to keep your liaisons to the short but sweet?”

“What, you can’t tell that just by looking at me?” Will asked shortly. “You disappoint me, Dr Lecter.”

Hannibal smiled. “You’re not entirely shut off from companionship, you have a dog at home. I imagine more than one, judging by the different coloured dog hair on your uniform.”

Will couldn’t help it, he glanced down at himself. Despite a rigorous brushing down with a lint roller, there was still some stubborn dog hair clinging to the front of his jacket.

“Bonding with animals shows you to be an empathic individual. Not to mention that i recognise your scent.”

That last part caught him off guard, derailing what he was going to say. “Wait, my scent?”

“Empathy has a certain scent,” Hannibal said by way of reply. “Even underneath that horrendous aftershave you insist on wearing.”

Will understood Hannibal’s words were designed to bait him to an emotional reaction, his aftershave was perfectly fine thank you. The scenting part, however, was worrying. “Empathy has no scent. That’s not possible.”

Hannibal pressed himself to the bars and took a deep breath before letting it out slowly, eyes sliding shut in what Will recognised as something akin to bliss. He was savouring it, committing it to memory. Dear God, this was a dangerous game to be playing with someone like Hannibal Lecter.

Will should turn around right now and walk away, what was he even thinking-

“There was a patient of mine, back when i was a psychiatrist. She was dieing of cancer. I could smell it in her scent, a sickly sweet smell like flowers turning to rot. She told me the Doctors diagnosed her with stomach cancer two weeks after i first noticed it.”

Will watched him with morbid fascination. “I’m going to take a wild guess and bet you didn’t say anything about smelling the cancer on her.”

Hannibal’s eyes flared. “I wanted to see how it would play out. Unfortunately, the woman in question didn’t make it.”

You wanted to play God, you mean, Will thought but didn’t voice out loud. “You can smell diseases on people. What an incredible sense of smell you have, Mr Wolf.”

A predator stared at Will through those eyes, making no effort to disguise it. “Since i was a boy. It would often give me migraines for days until i taught myself how to filter it all out. Turn it to my advantage.”

Will pulled a face, he couldn’t picture Hannibal as a child. A child meant innocence, untouched purity, which Hannibal was definitely not. He highly doubted he ever was.

Hannibal carried on talking like he never expected Will to respond. “Empathy smells like fire. Clean, very distinctive. There’s nothing quite like it. Tell me, Will. Do you dream the dreams of the insane? Does this place leave its mark on you, burrowing deep inside of you that you won’t be able to claw it out?”

Will smiled a humorless smile, trying not to shudder at his words. “Are you trying to psychoanalyse me Doctor? Perhaps you are missing the good old day of psychiatry?”

Hannibal gripped the bars of the cell, fingers tightening like he wanted to prise them apart to be on the same side as Will. “I want to know you, Will. Don’t you want to know me too?”

Will swallowed down the spike of fear at his words. “No. I don’t find you all that interesting.”

Hannibal’s answering smile was all teeth. “You will.”

Will’s talk with Hannibal had not gone unnoticed as he had hoped. Within the hour, Dr Chilton called down for Will to come to his office as soon as possible. It shouldn’t come as a surprise to Will that Chilton had his own access to all the CCTV feeds for his private perusal. Stupid to think otherwise.

Now, Will stood in front of his desk, straight backed with hands behind him. Chilton had not offered him a seat when he came in and Will was forced to remain standing.

Chilton sat at his desk, leaning back in his high back leather chair as if he was lounging by a swimming pool for vacation, completely at his leisure. He didn't look angry or put out, just watching Will from beneath his lashes. The seconds slid by as slow as minutes and Will's discomfort increased with it. Being stares at always kept him on edge.

Was he supposed to apologise for what he had done, grovel for forgiveness at the man's feet to keep his job? If that was the case, Chilton would be waiting for a long time.

Chilton finally broke the stalemate between them with a flick of his hand. "I'm not sure what it is that you hoped to achieve with your little tete a tete with Hannibal Lecter, Mr Graham, but you have no right to do what you did, nor do you have the relevant education to talk to my patient as you did. You're punching above your station as an orderly."

The condescension was thick in the man's voice, almost derisive for Will's job compared to his own lofty height as the head of the institution. It was intended as a reprimand, a reminder to mind one's own business, but it fell short of its mark. Will was confident in his education, his intelligence, so when people felt that they were superior to someone like him, it made no lasting impression other than general nastiness. Another facet of human interaction that Will didn't have the time for.

Chilton grew more animated with every word that passed his lips. "Your job here, in case this hasn't been drilled into you enough, is to do menial tasks for the ward, not to diagnose a man such as Hannibal Lecter. You are way over your head with someone like him."

On that, at least, Will could agree. "It was not my intention to do any such thing. He knew something about me and i wanted to know how he could possibly know that. He answered my questions, so i leave the diagnosis to you."

Chilton hummed a low disbelieving sound in the back of his throat. "Be that as it may, i gave you strict instructions to never engage him in any sort of conversation, to ignore him and

report if he attempted to engage you. Yet you went against the rules and he was able to draw you in to mess with you. And you fell for it hook, line and sinker."

Will didn't really need the stark reminder, he knew exactly what was happening from the first moment he stepped in front of Hannibal's cell. Apparently his impulse control was non existent.

Chilton sighed like he was put upon. "But i can't deny that our resident cannibal seems rather taken with you, Will. He's never paid so much attention to anyone in here before, let alone someone like an orderly. He really is desperate for company, isn't he?"

Will felt that was asked as a rhetorical question so he kept his mouth firmly shut and stared ahead of him.

"If he was longing for intellectual conversation, all he had to do was ask me and we could resume our session, but instead he continues to insist on sitting there in absolute silence while i ask questions of him. Like he is the long suffering martyr." Chilton continued, the edges of real frustration in his voice. He was actually pouting. "I was running out of ideas to get him to utter a single syllable, but it seems all i had to do was employ a man with a choir boy's face and social anxiety issues."

Will's hands clenched into fists behind him at being thought of in that way. "Lecter doesn't strike me as the type of man to be swayed by a man with a 'choir boy's face and social anxiety issues'."

Chilton turned smug. "That just shows how little you really know about him, after all. The man practically thrives on the aesthetics. This place hardly affords him the luxury he was used to when he was a free man, so when a little morsel comes his way, he snaps it up without so much as a blink."

Morsel. Whether Chilton meant it as a pun, Will couldn't say for sure. Either way, he shuddered at the insinuation and literal connotations.

“But who knows,” Chilton said after a lengthy pause of thought. “Maybe you’ll be the key to making him break his abominable silence. But a word of caution, Mr Graham, if you please. If you do decide to embark on another one of your ‘conversations’ with the man, do let me know, won’t you? I would hate for anything to happen to you and no one could come to your aid.”

Or miss any juicy serial killer details, Will thought, but instead said, “There won’t be any threat of that happening, Dr Chilton. I’ve learnt my lesson.”

“I imagine you have,” Chilton said. “But have any plans of stopping? I seriously doubt it. Think on what i said, won’t you.”

Chapter 4

The following weeks on the job went a little like this:

“Still wearing that god awful aftershave, I see.” Hannibal mused with the delicate upturn of his nose.

What a bitch. “I’m not sure what it is about my aftershave that offends you Dr Lecter-”

“It offends my olfactory sense in every conceivable way.” Was the genial reply.

“- but you’ll just have to live with it.” Will finished calmly as he administered prescriptive drugs to the inmate next to Hannibal’s cell, taking back the cup of water once the pale yellow pills were washed down with half hearted grumbles.

Hannibal hummed thoughtfully. “You should try something a little less smothering, using more natural products than the chemical. Something that whispers of a woody trail, getting lost amongst the trees.”

Will stared blankly at Hannibal. “Are you my personal scent shopper now?”

Before Hannibal could reply, Lecter’s neighbour said, “I like your aftershave, Mr Graham, sir.”

“Thank you Kenneth,” Will said, “I’m glad someone likes it.”

“I wouldn’t be too pleased about that,” Hannibal said, slipping away from the bars to lay back on his bed. “Kenneth likes the smell of his own urine. It’s hardly a ringing endorsement, wouldn’t you say?”

Will wrinkled his nose. “At east he doesn’t eat people,” he said petulantly before beating a hasty retreat to the sound of Hannibal’s soft laughter.

There was a quaint gentleman’s outfitters in the city that Will often passes to get his groceries at the local supermarket. He never really gave it much thought, not until they started advertising men’s skin care in one of the display cases in the window.

He hadn’t meant to go in, the clothes were too fine for his tastes (and bank balance), his usual ensemble consisted of faded jeans and a comfortable plaid shirt. He didn't belong in a gentleman's outfitters, but seeing the different bottles with their fancy names made something in Will cave and he veered into the shop before his thought process caught up with him. Fifteen minutes later he came out with a package of aftershave and moisturiser that had ‘oak’ undertones that the manager swore suited him.

He didn’t have enough confidence to wear it, knowing Hannibal would undoubtedly comment on it. He would act all smug that he had enough influence to change Will’s buying habits, for Will to care enough to *change* it. Will didn’t want to see that kind of knowledge in Hannibal’s eyes as he breathed in the new scent.

The aftershave remained languishing at the back of his sock drawer.

When Will’s skincare routine wasn’t a topic of conversation, his eating habits were. Hannibal seemed to have an odd fixation on whether Will was getting enough nutrients into his diet to be able to perform at maximum efficiency. Will wasn’t sure how he should feel about a Cannibal giving him tips about his diet. It would be amusing if it wasn't so creepy.

“How did we even get onto this conversation again?” Will asked, completely perplexed.

Hannibal merely smiled at him, “Before I was incarcerated, I was very conscious of what I put into my body. Everything the body needed was provided for by good home cooked meals with fresh ingredients.”

“Do people’s liver count as its own food group or do you count it a protein? I can’t help but wonder about that.”

Hannibal took the grouchy jibe as if Will had asked the question in all seriousness. “Some cultures considered the consuming of human flesh to be the right of passage into adulthood or as a warrior of the tribe. They may consume the brain or the heart of his enemy to acquire their strength and knowledge.”

“Was that what you were doing?” Will asked, unwillingly drawn into the conversation. He found himself interested despite his best efforts to remain entirely nonchalant. What would make a man eat another person when it clearly wasn’t for his survival in dire circumstances? “Consuming your victim’s strength and knowledge?”

Hannibal’s eyes were unfathomable in the poor lighting, they almost appeared black. “I wouldn’t give them that much credit, Will. I have no desire in acquiring anything from them. They simply served the purpose of gracing my dinner plate and making me full.”

“You didn’t respect them?”

“Not when they didn’t respect me.”

Will would have made a glib remark about going overboard on punishing the rude, but he stopped himself before the words could leave his lips. Hannibal hadn’t been insulted by Will’s taciturn nature yet, he only seemed to be interested bordering on the fond, but there was always the chance that interest could evaporate in the blink of an eye and ire to replace it.

Will cleared his throat before saying, “That maybe part of it, Hannibal, but I’m sure that’s not all of why you did it.”

Hannibal’s gaze flickered to the camera so briefly that it almost seemed like a blink. “I have to keep a little mystery about me or else you’ll grow bored and move on to another inmate to entertain you.”

Meaning he didn't want Dr Chilton to know any more than he needed to. Hannibal seemed to take a great deal of pleasure in making the other psychiatrist dance on the end of invisible wires before he cut them.

Hannibal returned back to their original topic of diet. "Of course, my circumstances are entirely different now that I am in here. The food that is served here is nothing more than sodden cardboard. I can't imagine what could possibly be your excuse for eating what you do," Hannibal said with a hint of accusation in his tone.

"For eating sodden cardboard?"

"For not taking better care of yourself."

Will rolled his eyes. "There is nothing wrong with microwavable meals. They are perfectly edible."

Will had said it for effect and he wasn't disappointed by the other man's reaction. Hannibal's face twisted into an offended grimace and Will enjoyed it immensely. "Besides, I don't know what makes you think I'm not taking care of myself. I'm doing just fine, thank you."

Hannibal leant against the bars, his arms hanging through the gaps. It brought Will's attention to the corded muscle beneath the tanned skin of his forearms. It was a non threatening stance, he made no attempts to reach out to Will, but Will still took a step back out of reach just in case. "I can tell by the pallor of your skin, the dark circles under your eyes. You might as well be eating sodden cardboard for all the good those microwavable meals do for you."

"You and your powers of deduction," Will grumbled. "Are you sure your real name isn't Sherlock Holmes?"

"I'm not English," Hannibal replied. "Do you not properly cook for yourself?"

Will shook his head. “I don’t have the time. Microwavable meals are easy to do and the least amount of effort.”

“Food should be enjoyed, savoured. It shouldn’t appeal simply on the basis of how convenient it is.”

“I can’t believe you are actually lecturing me on the benefits of home cooking,” Will said in an incredulous tone of voice. “I can’t believe this is my life right now.”

“If you are inexperienced in cooking, I can suggest several recipes that are remarkably easy to follow and will have more nutrients in it.”

“I’m not eating people, Hannibal. I don’t care how delicious you think it is.”

“They would be entirely people free, I assure you. I can even write them down for you.”

And that was how Will obtained several sheets of recipes in Hannibal’s neat cursive hand, with titles that consisted of ‘Protein scrambler’ for breakfasts, ‘Chicken broth’ for lunches and a lamb shank with redcurrant and rosemary for dinners. A part of Will had expected them to be ridiculously over the top with hard to find ingredients, but it seemed to be easy to make and chosen with Will’s inexperience in mind. Hannibal had wrote the instructions in such a way that even a novice like Will could easily understand it all. His mouth watered at the list of ingredients and he began to seriously contemplate the idea of trying them out.

Without people meat, of course.

It was against the Institute’s rules of accepting anything from an inmate and if Chilton saw the exchange, he never brought Will back into his office to reprimand him for it.

Despite the congenial way their interaction often played out, there was something about Hannibal that never allowed Will to ever forget that he was a serial killer. Beneath the elegant

exterior and his european manners that Hannibal fronted, there was a predator just waiting to tear free. It made the air between them hum in anticipation.

I see you, the predator said. *I know you.* A wolf hidden in the dark tree line of the wilderness, glinting eyes the only thing visible to its quarry.

Will needed to get out more, he was now calling himself the quarry in an overly tired metaphor. Hannibal would be delighted by it if he ever knew. Perhaps the Baltimore state institute did grow on you, making you a little mad in the end.

It was Barney who made Will doubt what he was doing with Hannibal. The man, normally working the day shifts, was covering for another orderly on sick leave. Barney spent the first couple of hours in awkward silence, offering up stilted commentary on mundane things until at last he came to whatever had been weighing heavily on his mind.

“I don’t mean to pry into your concerns,” he said, catching Will’s eyes with a look that said he was most definitely prying into Will’s concerns. Will ducked his head to hide the moment of irritated confusion. “But I have to know if *you* know what you’re getting yourself into with Hannibal Lecter.”

Will’s face heated despite the fact that Barney meant it with no sexual insinuation. He felt like he was a naughty child caught with their hand in the cookie jar just before dinner. “What do you mean?”

They were in the observation room, Barney sat at the monitors and Will taking inventory of the restraints/weapons. Barney was watching the screens like he was watching a very interesting documentary he couldn’t tear his eyes away from. “Your… conversations with him.”

“Did Dr. Chilton tell you about that?”

“He said to just keep an eye on the situation, nothing more.”

Will ducked his head again. “I know what i’m doing. It- It doesn’t mean anything.”

There was a short pause. “It’s not that I doubt your sincerity, Will. I just doubt Hannibal’s intentions. His words may seem harmless enough, it they came from any other person. But Hannibal twists them to suit his own purposes and most of the time it bodes ill for the other person.”

“I know that,” Will said, feeling his irritation grow at the warning. He’s been lectured often enough. “I’ve kept it from being anything personal, you don’t have to worry bout me.”

Barney shrugged his big shoulders. “Where Dr Lecter is concerned, it will always worry me. I don’t want you to get hurt, Will. I like you and Dr Lecter is not a nice person.”

Will pulled a face behind Barney’s back. “I imagine that is why he is in here and not a psychiatrist anymore. I mean, I could be wrong.”

Barney turned in his seat and directed a steady gaze at Will until Will had to turn away. “Just so long as you haven’t forgotten about that. This place can do a number on your head.”

Will wasn’t going to admit it aloud, but he would have to agree. When he had first started working for the institute, the very idea of having a casual conversation through bars with a serial killer would have made him second guess his mental health. It was almost like he had forgotten his right from wrong and ignored the reasons the inmates were in there for.

What am I doing?

Something must have passed across Will's face as Barney's eyes softened in concern. "I'm sure you are growing tired of hearing this but please be careful around him, Will. He seems to be fixated on you and i can't believe it's for a good reason."

His warning shouldn't have sent a frisson of excitement through Will's body like it did. His fingers stuttered over the pepper spray, concentration broken from his task, before he forced himself into carrying on with work. His mind shied away from the reason behind the excitement. It came from a dark place deep inside Will that he never wanted to look at for too long.

"No," Will said softly, eyes cast down. "It can't be a good thing."

Chapter 5

Like most things in life, everything soon changes for the better or for the worse.

“Will.”

Will was shocked out of his talk with Hannibal by Matthew Brown’s voice and he turned to see him walking towards them with a frown on his face.

“Everything alright?” He asked, eyes flicking between him and Hannibal, his eyes narrowing suspiciously on the latter.

Will stood up straighter, body coming to attention with the knowledge that he had been caught doing what he really shouldn’t be doing.

“I’m fine,” Will said, his surprise making him speak shortly. “Is something the matter?”

Matthew came to stand by Will, dismissing Hannibal without so much as a nod. “Barney wants you in the observation room for the staff meeting. I volunteered to come looking.”

“That’s very courteous of you,” Hannibal said, a twisted little half smile at his thin lips. “Barney must be proud to have such diligent employees working for him.”

Will looked sharply at Hannibal, but the man’s face was as genial as ever. Will had not mistaken the tone of bitterness in his voice.

“Always a pleasure, Lecter,” Matthew said, his lips pulled into a sneer boarding onto a snarl. “Come on, Will.”

The next part went oddly. Matthew reached out and placed his hand on Will's lower back to guide Will down the corridor and, if Will hadn't been looking at Hannibal at the time, he would have missed it. Hannibal's eyes tracked Matthew's movement and there was a tightening of his jaw muscles, the eyes narrowing imperceptibly. It happened in the briefest of moments before Hannibal's face smoothed out and he turned away.

Will suddenly felt cold with dread.

He had no choice but to follow Matthew's direction and leave the ward.

After that, something had changed fundamentally between Will and Hannibal. Will couldn't say for sure what it was exactly that had changed asHannibal remained his usual cryptic manipulative self. He engaged Will in philosophical conversation that often left Will feeling like he had been broken open, a light shining on his most darkest places. Hannibal carried on with his schedule of sketching, exercise and reading. If Will wasn't paying so much attention to the man, he wouldn't have seen anything amiss.

But he had been paying attention, that was the problem.

Hannibal's innate poise seemed to be lacking. He exercised with energy that erred on the vicious, like he was burning up with it. Hannibal's tone of voice suggested its usual teasing, but he watched Will with something bordering on the obsessive. The feeling raised hairs on the back of his neck and Will couldn't tell if the man stared at him like he wanted to kill Will or fuck him.

Something had upset Hannibal's equilibrium and it didn't take a genius to figure out that it had something to do with Will. Will just didn't know why.

There was a part of him that wanted to just come out and ask Hannibal that question, get an understanding of this man that seemed to take up so many of Will's thoughts day and night. But another part, perhaps the more level headed saner side, didn't want to know at all. There was no getting to know Hannibal Lecter without a little of his darkness creeping into your soul and making a home for itself. Permanent. Unbreakable. *Tainted.*

And what a thought that was.

During the night Abel Gideon had been complaining of migraines and elevated heart rate. Matthew and Will responded to the call, wheeling a wheelchair down to Abel's cell. The man did look pale, pain lines creasing his brow as he hunched in the corner where his bed met the concrete wall.

Alright, Gideon," said Matthew as Will unlocked the cell door and Matthew wheeled the chair into the cell. "Be a good boy or my friend Will here would have no choice but to use force against you and not the fun kind."

Abel's dazed eyes flickered to Will beneath his lowered lashes. "We'll have to save that part later, Mr Graham, when I feel up to it."

"Take it slow, Abel," Will said as he watched Abel slide closer to the chair and Matthew, Will's hand on his baton in case he tried to start any trouble. "We'll take you to the infirmary to get you looked at."

"Most generous," Abel murmured as he finally slid himself into the chair, a hand pressed to his chest with his eyes closed to the light above them.

Matthew secured his feet to the chair and, glancing at Will, used Abel's distraction to signal for Will to stay in the cell and have a look around. Sometimes inmates will use sickness to hide contraband somewhere else. Matthew will be keeping a close eye on Abel, while Will would be using the time to do a cell sweep for anything untoward that they might be hiding as well.

As Matthew took the ailing Abel to the infirmary, Will searched his cell in a thorough sweep and found nothing that would be confiscated. Abel was as meticulous as he was shrewd.

What little of his personal effects that was allowed here were stores neatly and his bed was pristine.

Will took a last cursory look around before he left the cell to head back to the staff room when Hannibal stopped him.

He stood pressed against the bars two cells down, hands wrapped around the metal with white knuckles. “You and Matthew Brown seem to make an excellent team.”

The comment was given like a compliment but Will hesitated. To him, it felt very much like he was being set up like a trap. “Matthew is a good man to work with,” Will said neutrally.

Hannibal’s face didn’t change. He hummed. “A good man. I would have to take your word for it. Matthew and I don’t really have much to say to each other. His topics of conversation are a little bit lackluster for my tastes.”

Will couldn’t help but be amused by this. “Not up to your standards, Dr Lecter? Not intellectually stimulating enough.”

“Not entirely, no.” Hannibal replied, not smiling. “I wouldn’t have guessed he would have been your taste either. When can I expect the good news?”

The conversation had jumped and left Will oddly thrown. “What good news?”

This time Hannibal did smile, but it wasn’t pleasant. “The good news of you and young Matthew becoming lovers, of course.”

Will eyebrows rose in surprise. “I’m not sure where you’ve got that idea from, but it isn’t true. We are colleagues, that’s it.”

Hannibal's hands had tightened on the bars. "I don't think he knows that, given the way he touched you."

Will had to scramble with his memories to figure out what Hannibal was referring to and was only more confused. "He touched me on the shoulder, I hardly think that constitutes as a lover's touch."

"Wouldn't you?" Now Hannibal sounded antagonistic. It was the first real example of his fury that Will had witnessed, disrupting his usual sanguine state. "That was a proprietary gesture. He felt he had the right to touch you and in front of others. What other deduction should I have come to?"

Will felt the beginning of irritation creeping in and he took a step forward towards Hannibal. "You may be an observant man, Dr Lecter, but this time your astuteness has led you astray. You see things that aren't there and assume wrongly. I'll trust you keep your opinions to yourself in the future-"

Will had made a big mistake. In his anger he had got too close to the bars of the cell and it allowed Hannibal's hand to whip out and grip Will's uniform and hauled him up against the bars. It was so sudden that Will didn't have the time to cry out and before he knew it, he was pinned against the cool metal from chest to knee. Hannibal's other hand cupped the back of his neck, holding Will immobile.

Will panicked, trying to tear himself free from Hannibal's strong grip, but cell doors were impossible to get purchase on to push away. "What are you doing?" He hissed.

Hannibal's face was impossibly close, his breath kissing across Will's cheek. "Don't fight me. I'm not going to hurt you."

Will opened his mouth to vehemently protest, the man was a serial killer after all, but shut it with an audible click when Hannibal leaned forward and brushed his nose against the juncture of his jaw and ear and inhaled deeply.

“Are you smelling me?” Will asked incredulously, his struggles dieing down with his surprise.

“You still insist on wearing that aftershave, what else am I supposed to do to get at your natural scent?”

“Don’t be a creep about it?” Will said viciously, renewing his efforts in pulling away.

Hannibal’s grip on him tightened almost to the point of pain and he straightened, his mouth now at Will’s ear. “Is it only Matthew that you give touch privilege to, Will? Will you not grant me that right?”

“I-” Will had no idea what Hannibal was saying, touch privilege, it was completely insane. He was an inmate, Will was an orderly, there was no way this could possibly be okay-

Will’s thoughts scattered as Hannibal drew Will’s ear lobe into his mouth and sucked.

It was like all of the strength was suddenly leached from Will’s body and he slumped against the bars with a small noise in his throat that sounded an awful like a mewl of enjoyment. Hannibal’s grip gentles, his hands kneading at Will’s flesh like he was trying to soothe a spooked colt. Every sweep of those fingers sent sparks of awareness through Will and his breath stuttered in his chest.

“That’s it,” Hannibal crooned, triumph unmistakable in his voice. “That’s it. Breathe easy for me.”

Will could only do what he was told to do. Excitement and fear flooded his body and it produced an odd drug like feeling, like his surroundings weren’t real. He should be pulling back, do everything in his power to make Hannibal release him, but instead he just slumped against the bars, welcoming Hannibal to continue his ministrations.

Wanting it.

Rescue didn't come in the form of common sense on Will's part, but of the sudden blast of an alarm shrieking in the corridor. It was loud, abrasive to the ears and Hannibal flinched from it. It shocked Will into pulling away from the bars, staggering until his back hit the opposite wall and he stared at Hannibal with unmitigated horror, panting like he had ran a marathon.

Hannibal was plastered to the bars, arm out towards Will like he could drag him back towards him. His features were twisted into a snarl eyes hungry and demanding.

Will tried to collect himself. "My apologies Dr Lecter. It looks like you won't be taking a chunk out of me today."

"Taking a bite out of you was far from my mind, Will," Hannibal said, his voice gravel even over the sound of the alarm.

Will would have answered with a scathing retort, but he didn't have the time. The alarms went off when an inmate tried to escape or for riots. Without a second glance back at Hannibal, Will rand down the hallway and out the doors of the ward to the observation room where Barney had just arrived. He was looking at the circuit boards where a light was flashing ominously.

"Alarm has been pulled at the infirmary," Barney shouted to be heard. "Come on."

They sprinted down the corridors to the heavy swinging doors of the infirmary and burst through--

Only to stop dead in their tracks and gape at the sight. Abel Gideon sat primly on the hospital bed with his legs hanging over the side and crossed at the thigh. He was the very picture of ease, if one didn't count the copious blood spatter all over his face, arms and the front of his jumpsuit.

In the middle of the infirmary floor was the body of Matthew Brown. He was arched over a series of implements found around the infirmary that pierced his limbs, suspending him over

the ground. Staged grotesquely. Brutal. There was so much blood that Will fought the instinctual urge to retch at the sight and smell of it.

“Jesus,” Barney hissed, eyes wide in his face. He didn’t look any better than how Will was feeling.

“Glad you boys could make it,” Abel said as he examined his blood stained finger nails. “I let the alarm off a while ago when Matthew here was still breathing. Doesn’t look like he is now.”

“Abel, what have you done?” Barney choked, taking a menacing step towards the man.

“I made a martyr of him,” Abel said plainly, before his eyes flickered briefly, oh so briefly, in Will’s direction. “He had a tendency of touching things that wasn’t his.”

Will’s stomach lurched sickeningly at the same time Barney dragged Abel to the floor and pinned him in place.

Chapter 6

Matthew Brown died before the paramedics and police arrived on scene. After evidence was taken and catalogued, Abel Gideon was escorted to solitary confinement in the darkest cell the institute boasted of (completely docile and a self satisfied smile on his lips) The only thing left to do was prise out the metal instruments and take the body away.

One paramedic ended up throwing up in the infirmary sink while the older, more experienced paramedic wheeled the body out on a gurney, sweating and lips pressed together tightly, the skin almost bloodless.

Amidst the shock and disbelief of what had happened, Will had a growing sense of foreboding, a sinking half-thought that the violent incident had something to do with Hannibal's outburst at his presumed assumption of Will and Matthew's 'relationship'.

Paranoia. It had to be. There could be no way that Hannibal's ire had made him speak to Abel, somehow convince him to play ill and, once he was alone with Matthew, kill him in coldblood. How did they get the opportunity to speak to each other? Why would Abel do Hannibal's bidding in the first place? Serial killers didn't make friends with other serial killers, their ego got in the way.

But what reason would Abel need to agree when he would be given the chance to do what his heart pined after: Murder.

It couldn't be possible. It wasn't. But Will had to know if it was his fault that Matthew was dead. Did Matthew unknowingly get caught up between him and Hannibal and paid the ultimate price for it?

Dr Chilton, bemused and red in the face, dismissed everyone from the infirmary back to their duties. The other orderlies were quiet and edgy as they all filed out. Despite what had happened, they had to remain to protect and control the asylum like it was any other day. Despite this, the corridors and the ensuing silence took on an oppressive sinister tone.

Will took the moment to get back to the observation room before any of the others had the chance to, heading straight to the CCTV camera monitors. Screen eight showed Hannibal lying down on his bed, legs crossed at the ankle and his arms pillowing the back of his head, eyes closed as if in sleep. Not a care in the world.

Will rewound the tape past an hour when Will had left Hannibal, alarm blaring and its red light flashing. Hannibal had watched him go, hands still at the bars and there -

right there -

He was smiling.

The next night, when the infirmary had been cleared up and all relevant statements had been taken by the police, Chilton stood in front of Will and the orderlies who had been on shift during the ‘incident’ in his office.

Barney was with them, having been called in as their supervisor and to be briefed on the events. Will glanced at him and the man was standing with his arms across his chest, stone faced and closed off.

“Matthew’s family have been notified,” Chilton was saying, “of this whole fiasco and the institution has honoured the life insurance care package in his name.”

Will wanted to snort. That must have rankled the Institution’s company Directors.

“Abel Gideon will remain in a locked padded cell with all privileges revoked come judgement day. He is now in the sole custody of Barney and the night manager. None of you are to talk to him or see him. I don’t want any of you turning vigilante in the name of justice

and beat the shit of him. The newspapers are already tearing this place's reputation apart like a pack of wolves, turning it into a gross misconduct of management."

The orderlies remained silent. Will imagined all of them would be much happier if they never saw Abel Gideon's face ever again, let alone searching him out for revenge.

Chilton carried on. "I cannot reiterate enough how disastrous it is if you let your guard down around these animals. You are not babysitting children, you are in charge of serial killers and rapists with severe mental deficiencies of the most deplorable kind. You make one false move and they will take advantage of it without hesitation. Unfortunately for our Mr. Brown, the consequences of his error in judgment was the loss of his life."

A ripple of discomfort went through the orderlies. It was uncomfortable to hear Chilton speak of Matthew's death like that, bordering on disrespectful, crass, but he spoke the truth. Gideon had got the better of Matthew and he had paid for it. Gideon could have done that to any of them.

Not to you , a traitorous part of Will's mind whispered. *That would have gone against Hannibal's plans for you.*

Protected by another serial killer, christ.

"Now, let this be a lesson to all of you. Vigilance and caution is what keeps you all safe, gentleman." Chilton glare at them before snapping, "Dismissed."

The orderlies filed out of the room without a second glance back. Will was about to follow them when Chilton called him back with Barney.

"I want you and Barney to accompany me to Hannibal Lecter's cell," Chilton said. "I have a few words I would like to share with our resident cannibal."

Barney's brow creased in confusion. "Dr Lecter, sir? But why?"

Chilton's eyes strayed to Will. "You think Abel Gideon would have done what he did without some little bird twittering in his ear to do it? Abel has always been remarkably receptive to other's commands and Hannibal would have asked so sweetly."

Will didn't say anything, but that dark cloying feeling in the pit of his stomach intensified.

Hannibal's cell was quickly and efficiently stripped down to the basic amenities so prolific of criminal institutions such as these. Gone were the sketches on the wall, the stationary and the paper that was afforded to Hannibal. They were snatched down by orderlies that paid no heed to ripping them or creasing the paper beyond repair. Loose leaf periodical were next to go, letter and articles were dumped on top of it all in storage boxes before being carted away and leaving the four of them alone in the cell.

Barney had strapped a unresisting Hannibal into a buckled straight jacket and a mask that acted as a muzzle, covering the bottom half of Hannibal's face with a gap for him to speak out of. He was tied to something that reminded Will of a trolley that delivery men used to cart stacks of boxes around, forcing Hannibal to stand up straight and leaning back. All the better to purposefully unbalance him from doing untoward to anyone.

Barney remained standing behind Hannibal with his hands loosely at his sides, ready for any incidents that may occur. Will stood by the cell door, unsure of his own purpose in this confrontation, while Chilton lounged on Hannibal's striped bed, the man acting like he wasn't worried. Like he wasn't baiting a serial killer. Chilton even smiled like he was enjoying every moment of it.

"I know you had something to do with Abel Gideon attacking and murdering an orderly last night, Dr Lecter," Chilton said conversationally as he played about with a pen he had had in his pocket between his fingers. "I don't know how and I don't know why you did it, but your particular brand of finesse is written all over it."

Hannibal was watching Chilton with amusement that bordered on mocking. Chilton wasn't the only one who was enjoying this, Will thought with restlessness.

Chilton carried on regardless. "Perhaps you whispered sweet nothings in his ear, encouraged or manipulated him into doing what he did. Being a psychiatrist, I imagine it was mere child's play to have him wrapped around your little finger. Your pet attack dog."

Hannibal tilted his head to the side, like the very animal Chilton accused Abel of being would when it was trying to make out the sound it heard distantly. "If that is indeed what I did, as you say, it would be difficult for me to whisper sweet nothings in his ear when his cell is two away from my own."

Chilton merely smiled. "My dear Dr Lecter, are you really trying to argue a lack of imagination? I find that very hard to believe, given the events that led to you being incarcerated in the first place." His eyes passed over the now bare walls, the toilet that was missing its seat. "Though being in here for the last three years and not having your usual stimulus, it must have dulled your mind somewhat."

Will didn't have to see the whole of Hannibal's face to know that Chilton's barbed words had hit their intended mark. The eyes narrowed imperceptibly, focus sharpening like razor blades on skin and his chin tipped upwards in defiance. Will could only guess that his irritation was due to the insult of his mind going in this place. Hannibal had the reputation for revelling in the aesthetics, but Will believed that his true vanity was in the superiority of his own mind.

"Then I believe you have your answer," Hannibal replied, his tone never giving away to his emotion.

Chilton scowled. "Just because you think I am a fool, Lecter, doesn't actually make me one. You somehow spoke to Gideon, put the idea in his head and he acted on it with vigour. You have cost me and this institution a great deal of embarrassment."

"Knowing you for as long as I have, I can safely say that you have no need of me making an embarrassment of yourself. You do perfectly well on your own."

Barney looked away in case something of his amusement showed on his face and Will cleared his throat awkwardly.

Chilton smiled, displaying his perfectly whitened teeth. “You think you’re so clever, don’t you?” He said softly, with a hint of threat. “Like a King in his castle and the rest of us your peasants. It doesn’t work like that Hannibal, it never has. This is not a castle and you are not a King. You are a prisoner here, and I your jailor. Trust me when I say that I will do everything in my power to make sure you will never see the light of day, that your years with us will be the most miserable and dull of your life.”

Hannibal was a statue, like Chilton’s words simply glided over him as if they didn’t mean a thing. But the atmosphere had changed around them, like it was charged and a tiny spark could ignite the air and set the whole cell to flame.

“I can’t prove your involvement, of course,” Chilton sighed a he stood up and walked to stand in from of Hannibal. “But that hardly matters. Abel Gideon remains in solitary until the Directors decide what to do with him and I get to lock the ward down as I see fit. Which means all of your precious personal effects go to storage until further notice. No more toys for you, i’m afraid. Mail delivery will be postponed until I say otherwise, your movements will be restricted to your cell and unless you draw on the walls with your own feces, I would suggest keeping those city skylines fresh in your memory. You won’t be seeing pencil and paper for quite some time, I fear.”

Hannibal leant forward against the restraints that were binding him, head lowered so he was closer to Chilton. Chilton didn’t take a step back but it was a near thing. “You do conjure the most vile of pictures, Doctor. But you’re right, of course. It’ll keep my failing imagination from waning entirely.”

Chilton grimaced at him. “See that you do.” He turned to leave the cell but lighted upon Will at the door as if he had entirely forgotten he was standing there. Perhaps he had. “Ah yes, Will Graham.” His eyes flickered back to Hannibal before he fixed them on Will again. “As this ward is now on lockdown for the foreseeable future, it seems that I won’t be needing all orderlies we normally have on staff to be down here. I will require the use of you in my office for your shifts.”

Will floundered for a moment, surprised at the sudden news before he finally managed a “yes, sir”.

No more toys for you.

Chilton looked back at Hannibal triumphantly and all the pieces fell into place. Chilton's acquiescence to Hannibal and Will's conversations, making Barney keep an eye on Will. He had wanted Hannibal to grow interested with Will, allowed the inmate to grow attached, so that when the time came he could punish Hannibal, by snatching Will away like some god damned toy.

By the expression on Hannibal's face, it had worked. If looks could kill, Chilton would have been savaged to death.

"Come Barney," Chilton threw over his shoulder as he spirited Will away. "Let us leave Hannibal to his thoughts."

The door clanged shut after them and Will could see Hannibal through the bars.

His eyes promised retribution.

Chapter 7

True to his word, Dr Chilton had Will play receptionist to him in his office and away from Hannibal's ward. He sat at a tiny desk out in the reception area that housed a coat rack, a dark brown leather sofa and a low coffee table that had issues of Good Housekeeping from at least six months ago on it.

After five days of mind numbing repetition of answering phone calls, replying to Chilton's correspondence and fetching coffee for the man himself, Will started to hate it with a fiery passion of a thousand suns.

If Will thought manning the CCTV in the observation room was boring, it was by no means a comparison to being Chilton's receptionist. Usually an inmate of the less deadly variety oversaw such things, but Chilton was adament that Will was the man for the job. "It would be nice to have a sane man of conversation at the desk," he said with a tasteless smile on his face. "It often gets tedious when Lionel talks of nothing but rabbits, wouldn't you agree?"

If Chilton wanted someone to talk to, he shouldn't have picked Will for the job.

Chilton was a difficult man to talk to, in any case. He was a man who could speak endlessly on the aggrandisement of his own career and success but have little interest in anything that didn't involve psychiatry or himself.

Not that Will saw much of Chilton anyway. He was either in his office with the door firmly shut or he went home for the night. It was a relief on Will's nerves to be out of the presence of the man. Something about him made Will's skin crawl.

It left Will with a lot of free time on his hands and it often led to Will's mind continously poring over the events of the last week or so. It helpfully supplied him with high definition detail of Matthew's body splayed out grotesquely. And Hannibal's reaction on the monitor, that damnable smile.

Was Matthew’s death his fault? Could there have been a way to have prevented it?

Of course there was. He should never have indulged in his curiosity with Hannibal in the first place, he should have done the right thing and ignored the man’s attempt to engage him. He had brought this on himself and Matthew had paid the price for it.

The guilt and the self chastisement was a bitter pill to swallow but he made himself feel it. It was the least he could do for such an incident and if he was really honest with himself, he would have handed in his work notice the moment after it had all gone down.

But he hadn’t.

And that was more telling than anything will could have said and done.

The crackling sound of the intercom sounded. “Will, enter me office if you please.”

Will moved into Chilton’s office to see him poring over sheets of paper at his desk. They were spread out on the surface and a cursory glance showed that they were Hannibal’s drawings. They were supposed to be in storage, but instead the box lay at Chilton’s feet, carelessly rummaged through.

After a pause Chilton looked up and offered a smile that was entirely too gleeful. “Will, come take a seat. I have something of interest to show you that you’ll find interesting.”

Will seriously doubted it but he sat down in the chair opposite the desk anyway. Chilton passed over several sheets of paper with a flourish. Will accepted them with a frown, glancing down to see Hannibal’s pencil drawings of hands in mid movement, the musculature of an upper arm tensed, the throat of a man with the sharp relief of an adam’s apple, the collarbone poking out in the V of a white orderly's uniform-

Will flicked through the pages with a dawning sense of panic at the familiarity of the form. Will should know, it was his own body that Hannibal had rendered in loving detail. There

were many of Will's face with varying expressions, some solely of his eyes, his curls falling across his forehead, his lips parted -

With his blush spreading across his cheeks, Will saw that Hannibal had sketched a full body model of Will, naked and in repose on what looked like bed sheets, eyelashes drooping over lowered eyes in an expression of demure sensuality. The image froze Will, rendering him unable to tear his gaze away from it.

Chilton laughed under his breath at Will's reaction, thoroughly enjoying the moment. "I must confess, it stopped me in my tracks too. Such attention to detail that man has. It is a marvel."

Will realised his hands were almost tearing the paper with how tight he was gripping it and he forced himself to relax.

Chilton carried on, completely oblivious to Will's unbalanced equilibrium. "I had first thought he was merely distracted by you, a little infatuation in a lonely man. But now I see he is completely obsessed with you." He laughed again and leaned back in his seat.

It wasn't funny. This man, this psychiatrist with all his credentials and responsibility, considered this an amusing joke. Matthew was dead and Hannibal was exerting power that extended beyond the far walls of his cell. Devastating power.

This had gone far beyond a mere game and Chilton seemed to have no clue whatsoever.

Will pushed the pages back onto the table between them, eager to be away from Hannibal's… regard for him.

"I don't know why Hannibal has drawn me," Will said finally. "But I doubt it is obsession as you say."

"Fixation. Fascination. Pick whatever adjective you would prefer, Mr Graham, but we both know that Hannibal has you in his sights, an object for his own entertainment. Are you not curious as to where this will lead? I know i am."

Will stood up. “I can imagine it will lead to nowhere good. Can I go now or do you have further use of me?”

Chilton swept his hand towards the door. “By all means. After a suitable length of time that I deem satisfactory, you can start working on the ward again. Dr Lecter certainly has missed you so.”

Will didn’t bother to reply, just let the door slam shut behind him do all the talking.

But Will couldn’t just leave it at that. Of course not.

Like a moth to a flame, he was drawn to Hannibal by an unstoppable force that wouldn’t allow him to even contemplate the idea of putting a stop to their interactions. Will’s determination and guilt spurred him on to get the answers he sorely needed about the reason for Matthew’s death.

Will knew it was because of him like he seemed to know certain things, but he needed to hear it out loud, by the man who wanted the killing to happen. Who had apparently ordered it.

Abel Gideon would have been the obvious choice to question but he was in solitary confinement and that meant that Will couldn’t get to him without raising the alarm and Will wasn’t in the mood to be answering to Chilton again.

Hannibal, on the other hand, would be very easy to talk to with the ward on lockdown, all but two orderlies had been assigned to the other wards to oversee. Barney oversaw the ward

during the day and a man named Stephen Baker oversaw it during the night shift. Will had only spoken to the man a handful of times and knew of him through talk of the other orderlies that he was a single father of three teenage children who was trying to pay their way through college. And if the talk was reliable, he was amenable to monetary bribes to turn a blind eye to certain things.

When Will's receptionist duties were done for the moment, Will made his way to the observation room that Baker was in. He slipped the man a white envelope with money and Baker, without even having to be asked, turned the monitors off and pulled out a sports magazine to flip through. "You've got fifteen minutes." He said gruffly.

That was more than enough time to ask what he needed.

In the dim glow of the night lights, the ward was eerily silent and forlorn. The inmates hardly stirred, either asleep or not daring to make any noise. They knew what had happened, that lockdown had been invoked and now there was an air of watchfulness that had settled over everyone. Like the deep breath before the plunge. What they were waiting for, Will couldn't guess at.

It made his skin itch with irritation.

Will stopped at Hannibal's cell and peered through the gloom. He could just make out at the shapes of the bed and toilet (minus the seat) and on the bed was the stretched form of Hannibal in repose. His features were in shadow but Will didn't need to see his face to tell he was awake. Hannibal was an incredibly light sleeper and the squeak of Will's standard issue rubber soled shoes had announced his presence the moment he had stepped onto the ward.

"Is Chilton right?" Will started. "Was it you that made Gideon attack Matthew and kill him?"

Hannibal's deep voice seem to rumble through the darkness. "Please, Will. Let's not sully our reunion with that man's name, he is beneath you. If you are to ask me the questions that must be burning on your tongue, say it with your own convictions."

Will blew out a breath. “Fine, but the question remains the same. Did you have Gideon kill Matthew?”

The sound of metal against concrete grated as Hannibal stood from the bed, his shadowed figure coming closer to the bars before the glow revealed his face. In the week since the last time Will had seen Hannibal, he looked thinner in the cheeks, like he hadn’t been eating properly (the fault of Chilton’s punishment perhaps?). His skin was paler from having his outdoor exercise privilege being revoked, dark circles under his eyes like faded bruising.

Hannibal leant against the bars, his eyes hungrily drinking the sight of Will up. “Why ask me the question you already know the answer to?”

Will swallowed reflexively. “I want to hear you say it.”

Hannibal glanced at the CCTV camera above them. “Are you trying to entrap me, Will? Did Chilton send you to me to get a confession?”

Will shook his head. “Chilton didn’t send me, he doesn’t know i’m speaking to you. The CCTV is off for fifteen minutes, i’m here of my own volition.”

Hannibal smiled. “Clever boy.”

Will took a step closer. “Will you answer my question?”

Hannibal tilted his head to the side, regarding Will with his unnerving gaze. “What will I get in return for my honesty?”

That pulled Will up short. Hannibal had always been forthcoming in their conversations, it had never occurred to Will that Hannibal would want something for it. Will shifted uncomfortably. “There’s not much I can get you, Hannibal. The ward is on lockdown and all of your possessions have been taken-”

“I’m not asking you to smuggle contraband to me,” Hannibal calmly interrupted. “That’s not what I want.”

Will shrugged, confused. “Then what do you want?”

Hannibal considered Will beneath lowered lashes. On any other person it would have been a coy move. Hannibal was anything but coy. “An exchange of information.”

Will hadn’t realised he had been holding himself so tensely until he relaxed. He had expected something - well, he wasn’t sure what. “Quid pro quo again, Doctor?”

“Naturally,” Hannibal replied. “I’ll tell you everything about Matthew if you tell me about the first lover you were intimate with.”

Will blinked, imagining he hadn’t heard him correctly. “My first intimate lover?”

“Yes,” Hannibal said, his face barely giving anything away. “A relatively painless exercise, wouldn’t you agree?”

“Hannibal,” Will said slowly. “You somehow coerced another serial killer into murdering a man who suspected of liking me and now you want me to regale you with the story of my first lover?”

Hannibal’s laugh was pitched low and it did something indescribable to Will’s stomach. “The two cannot be compared. Your first lover is simply a memory, and like most people’s first time, it is often awkward and unpractised. I didn’t know you then, whereas Matthew was a ‘could-have-been’ and afforded the opportunity to become something more, something I am unable to be to you as i’m in here.”

And there it was, this compulsion between them finally laid bare. All the pieces of a pictureless puzzle had clicked together and Will cleared his throat, trying to rally his thoughts. “You sound very confident that you would be a ‘might-have been’ if circumstances were different.”

Hannibal looked at him steadily. “Can you tell me differently?”

Will could not and he wasn’t going to humiliate himself by pretending. “We’ll never know, seeing as you are in here. Now, what do you want to know about him?”

“How old were you?” Hannibal asked.

“Seventeen, Andrew was a year older than me.”

“Did he know about your empathy?”

Will shook his head. “No, nobody knew outside of my parents. It wasn’t something I was comfortable with everyone knowing. Besides, this isn’t the questions you want answered, is it?”

Hannibal raised an eyebrow. “No?”

Will gave him a sly look. “You want to know about my first time being intimate, not my empathy. Wasn’ that the word you used? My first intimate lover?”

Hannibal smiled. “Then how was it?”

“Exactly as you said. Awkward. Unpractised. Painful.”

“Painful in the usual sense of something other?” Hannibal asked.

Will rubbed at his wrist absentmindedly, shy on the details. “Painful in the usual sense, we didn’t have much other than a general clue as to what we were supposed to do. Painful in another when i realised the impressions of his thoughts that i got were of him thinking of another. It was something i could have done without knowing.”

Hannibal’s eyes were bright in the gloom. “Poor judgment on his part. Does your empathy amplify with touch? Skin to skin?”

“Nothing like that,” Will replied. “I just- i just have to know that person. Get a feel for them, understand them.”

“Interesting,” Hannibal murmured.

Will shook himself from the memories. “Now, will you tell me about Matthew? I’ve kept up my part.”

Hannibal acquiesced. “As you wish. I am certain you have worked out the particulars on your own. Matthew Brown needed to die and it was done.”

It was chilling how easy Hannibal could come out and just say it, like he was ticking something off a chore list. “How did you get Gideon to do it?”

“It was not as difficult as you seem to think it was. I planted the idea in Abel’s thoughts, how easy it would be to kill an orderly, how Matthew’s treatment of the inmate’s shouldn’t be allowed to carry on. We’re all serial killers, Will, it doesn’t take much for us to take someone’s life when we want to.”

“And Abel wanted to,” Will finished for him.

“He has been in here the longest out of all of us,” Hannibal agreed. “He jumped at the chance. I only wish I could have witnessed it.”

“I’m sure you would have enjoyed it too,” Will said derisively. “Were you bored, Dr Lecter? Boredom must not sit well with you and any perceived slight can justify you in murder.”

“There was no perceived slight, Will, he had every intention of making you his.” Hannibal said, not raising his voice in anger like Will had done.

“I am no one’s,” Will hissed. “And I refuse to feel any more guilt about this. Your actions are your own, regardless of what you think you did it for.”

Will turned and walked away, the sound of his shoes making it all very dramatic. But it could not drown out the sound of Hannibal’s breathy laughter.

Chapter 8

Matthew Brown's funeral was held on a Thursday afternoon at his hometown church about an hour away from where Will lived. It was, as one might expect, a closed casket affair.

Will dressed in his best (and only) black suit and crisp white shirt. He forwent the tie, the feeling of restriction around his throat never sitting well with him. Like a noose, he thought as he checked himself in a mirror, smoothing his unruly curls down in some semblance of order before rubbing at his newly shaved jaw. He felt naked without the stubble.

He was nervous. Nervous and blatantly stalling. He picked his car keys up from the kitchen counter, his dogs all in their beds by the fire and watching him intently. Will's sombre mood had made them subdued and less inclined to swarm him as per the usual. He made sure they all had enough water in their bowls before he finally left for the drive to the funeral.

The service was bigger than the one's Will had been to before, comprising of a large family and a great number of friends and well wishers in attendance. Most of the seats was filled and Will was unsure how to feel about it. He was comforted to know Matthew's life had been full, but despaired that his death impacted so many.

He sat at the back of the church, at the end of an isle. Eyes down cast, face forward, the body language of a man who was only here to pay his respects to the deceased and not here for small talk. Besides, what exactly was he supposed to say? I'm sorry for your loss? Your son will be buried six feet under because of me?

The Priest began his sermon, his tone of voice a soothing balm to Will's frayed nerves. He may not believe in any organized religion, but those who honoured the call of the priesthood always had something reassuring about them.

From the corner of his eye, Will realised that someone was watching him from the other side of the pew and one row ahead. Meeting their gaze, Will saw it was a woman. A striking woman with perfectly curled true blond hair and a form fitting suit dress gazed back at him with a curiously level gaze that gave little away about her thoughts. She could have been anywhere between early thirties to late forties, her makeup and skin had that ageless quality to it that made people stop and admire her.

When their eyes met, she gave no indication of embarrassment of being caught staring at him. She merely inclined her head in a nod of greeting before turning back to the front.

The sermon ended and they all filed out after the coffin bearers to the plot already dug and waiting. The day had become overcast and the wind decidedly chilled for a September day. Will buried his chin further into the collar of his wool coat and hung back from the gathering crowd around the coffin.

The Priest held a traditional prayer, followed by the laying of wreaths by family members. Once the pomp of ceremony was finished, groundskeepers lowered the coffin into the ground.

I'm sorry , Will thought to the memory of Matthew. *I'm so sorry* .

Will gradually became aware of his surroundings and realized the blonde woman from earlier was now standing silently beside him, her eyes on the coffin. People were beginning to leave, heading for their parked cars in sombre groups, flowing around them. They were two static anomalies in a sea of black suits and conservative dresses.

"Is there anything I can help you with?" Will finally asked when the silence stretched on between them.

The woman met his eyes with her disconcerting stare. It was like being peered into. "You must be Will Graham," she said, he voice pleasantly low and even.

Will felt a jolt of surprise at the stranger knowing his name. "Do I know you?"

"I imagine not," was her glib reply. "My name is Bedelia Du Maurier. I was once Hannibal Lecter's therapist, before he was convicted of the murders."

Will felt like he had been punched in the gut at her words. The information took a while to properly process and a hundred different questions vied with his tongue to be asked first - *A therapist for a therapist? Why was he here at Matthew's funeral? How did she know his name and him by sight?* This couldn't be mere coincidence, did Hannibal have anything to do with this, did he send her, i'm going to kill him-

His thoughts must have been written all over his face as she placed a delicate hand on his arm to still his words. "I think this is a conversation to be had when we are not in a cemetery surrounded by people, wouldn't you agree?"

Will glanced around them and couldn't help but to agree. "Then what do you suggest?"

She pulled her hand away. "Here is a diner a couple minutes drive from here. If you can follow me, we can talk there."

Will hesitated for only a moment before agreeing. The idea that this was a trap was fleeting. Whatever rabbit hole he was about to plunge into, he was doing it with his eyes wide open.

The diner was a quaint, just off the road establishment that served coffee, pastries and breakfast items all day long. There was only a couple of patrons in the diner, either reading the local newspaper or talking to their lunch partner. No one paid them any mind as they came through the door, save for the admiring glances at Bedelia and the young male server who sat them down and got them two black coffees.

Once the server had left them, Will stirred his coffee with a spoon, making the metal clink against the china cup. "Did you come to Matthew's funeral so you could talk to me?"

Bedelia lifted her cup to her lips but didn't take a sip, left it hovering there so she could look at him over the rim. "I did not. I didn't know that you would be attending the funeral. Matthew was once a client of mine, when he was a teenager. I came to pay my respects to his family."

Will hadn't known that Matthew had seen a therapist or for what reason, but Will shouldn't have been surprised by it. Therapy was a private matter, some even considered it shameful to have to admit that they needed help. Matthew wouldn't have wanted to televise to everyone, particularly to someone who was just a work colleague.

"I see," he said, and he did. "What I don't get is how you could possibly know who I am."

She watched him unerringly. "Can you not guess? We do have an acquaintance in common, after all."

"Hannibal Lecter," Will said. "But that still doesn't answer my question."

"Doesn't it?" She takes a soundless sip and placed her cup back on the table, easing back into her seat. "Despite his incarceration, Hannibal and I have remained in contact through letter correspondence."

"A therapist for a therapist?" Will asked sardonically, tamping down the sharp edge of an ugly emotion at the thought of the beautiful Bedelia talking to Hannibal. It didn't have a place in this conversation, certainly not in his life right now.

Bedelia nodded, a smile never touching her lips. Did she ever smile? "Of a sorts, certainly not in any official capacity. Dr Chilton would hardly allow it."

"I imagine not."

"In this correspondence, Hannibal often wrote about you. Obsessively so."

There was that word again: obsession. He was beginning to get really tired of it. "And what does he obsessively say about me I wonder?"

Bedelia didn't take any notice of the bite to his words, or if she did she chose to ignore it. "Hannibal has expressed an interest in you, particularly in regards to feeling a certain kinship he felt. He finds your view of the world and your intelligence refreshing."

Will snorted. "Of course he would say that, he's locked up for the rest of his life with very few people to talk to."

Bedelia raised her eyebrows. "You and I both know that that isn't the case with Hannibal. He has a certain way of being able to integrate with society and yet being entirely above it. He often expressed to me an inability to feel connected to others. No one has come close to having a deep connection with him, not even I. It would involve peeling back the veil and seeing him for what he really is and most would not survive the experience."

"You were his therapist," Will said disbelievingly. "How could you not know what hides behind the veil?"

She didn't take offence to his words. "I saw whatever Hannibal wanted me to see, whichever mask or, perhaps more apt, what person suit he decided to wear during our sessions." Bedelia replied. "And while I caught glimpses of what may lie beneath the surface, my mind shied away from the possibility of what he truly is."

"A cannibal."

"Il Mostro," she murmured to herself before she leaned forward, her gaze not allowing Will to tear his own away from her. "I can't help but wonder if you would do the same. If he were to completely divest himself of all his pretensions and revealed himself wholly to you, would you flinch? Would you draw away from him as others have done in his past or would you welcome him with open arms?"

A hundred different replies sprang to Will's lips, *I know who he is, a cannibalistic serial killer, of course I would flinch. Wouldn't that make me a monster too?* But Will said none of those things. In part they would be a complete lie. Will would be fooling himself if he believed Hannibal was only a serial killer. He made Will feel…

Everything.

He was more himself with Hannibal than he was with any other person since his father died. What the hell did that mean?

Will turned away from those thoughts. “Are you suggesting that I don’t reject him for what he is?”

“I confess a professional curiosity in seeing what would happen if he peeled back the veil and you accepted him. It would change the both of you in ways that i doubt either of you can fully imagine.” She turned back to her cup of coffee as if she was considering its entire existence. “But i wouldn’t encourage you either way, that would be unethical of me.”

“A little bit unethical, yeah.” Will said glibly. “You have more in common with Dr Chilton than you think. But something tells me you would do it anyway, perhaps more so because it was unethical. After all, you would to be different from all the other therapists out there for Hannibal to choose you as his own.”

Bedelia inclined her head, not protesting. “I can only make conjectures as to the reasons he chose me for the part, my ethical boundary has always been - lacking, shall we say, when it comes to Hannibal Lecter. I’m sure you have had the same difficulties. That’s why you are having coffee with me.”

There was that ugly feeling again. Will leant back in his seat, fighting the strange urge to laugh. “Look at us. We are like the wives to Bluebeard, hoping to survive our marriage to death.”

She looked at him with knowing eyes. “It’s interesting that you use the Bluebeard reference in regards to you and Hannibal,” she said as she collected her coat and bag from the seat beside her and stood up. “If you really want my advice, I would tell you to get as far away from the Institute as you can while you are still able and never look back. I was serious about him changing you, Will. That change may not be for the better for you and where Hannibal Lecter is concerned, there will be no coming back from it.”

And with that, Bedelia Du Maurier walked out of the coffee shop without a second look back. Will continued to sit there with his cold cup of half drunk coffee and looked out of the window at the passersby.

He wondered what it was like to be them.

Normal.

Later that evening, when Will had got home and stripped himself out of the suit in favour of a pair of jeans and a t-shirt soft from multiple washes, Will sat down in front of his laptop and composed his letter of notice to the Baltimore State institute for the criminally insane.

Will wasn’t sure he wanted to be changed at all.

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A series of complex emotions flowed across Dr Chilton's face when he received Will's notice that Will had a hard time picking them apart. The man soon settled on irritated neutrality as he stared at Will over the letter in his hands. "Well, i'm not going to lie and say this doesn't come at an inconvenient time."

Will raised a sardonic eyebrow at him. "Inconvenient? The ward is on lockdown and you've shuffled everyone around to fit their shifts to give them something to do. i'm on reception duty. I can't imagine a better time, really."

Will knew what Chilton really meant, what he wouldn't say out loud. It was 'inconvenient' to Chilton because he wasn't done with his games involving a certain inmate. And those games relied on Will being very much accessible and at Chilton's beck and call.

Inconvenient, indeed.

Chilton huffed. "It's difficult to find someone to fill the role of an orderly in a place such as this institution, someone of a certain disposition." He tapped the letter with a fingertip before placing it on the desk like it was distasteful to him. "And so soon after the completion of training you've undertaken too. It really is a waste of everyone's time, don't you agree?"

The high handed condescension was back in full force, the barb missing Will by a mile. He couldn't drum up any feeling about it. "It is unavoidable," Will said unapologetically. "As you say, it takes a certain someone to do this job and I clearly don't have it."

Chilton leant forward, eyes oddly bright and fixed. "Are you so sure of that? Judging by your job performance so far, you are exactly right for a role in this institution. I would even go so far as to say you were born for it."

Will held himself still, trying not to give his thoughts away. Was Chilton talking about the orderly job or was he referring to belonging as a inmate himself in a place like this? Knowing Chilton, it was probably both.

Just the thought of if made Will's throat close up in panic and the palms of his hands sweat. Will would rather die than be locked up with no natural light and only the walls to stare at.

"I'm sure," Will said with finality.

Chilton continued to watch him through lowered lashes, the silence stretching on between them until it wore thin and strained. Chilton was applying pressure, but Will was a patient man. He could wait the other man out come judgment day.

He didn't have to wait too long. Chilton broke the staring contest. "I can't, with a clear conscience, force you to stay with us, Mr Graham. Though it behooves me to watch you go, I must ask you if this sudden change of heart was brought on by a certain individual?"

And a certain practicing psychiatrist who has no thought for who he was toying with , Will thought bitterly. "Among other things."

Chilton smiled a smile that didn't warm his eyes. "If you are worried that Hannibal will hurt you, I can assure you that all precautions have been taken. There really is no cause to be frightened."

Will's eyes narrowed. "You mean like the precautions taken before Matthew was murdered?"

Chilton scowled.

Will couldn't stop himself from commenting further. "You're an idiot if you think Hannibal's cell and that mask will protect you from him, Dr Chilton. You often talk of the rest of us forgetting how dangerous he can be, but it's you who has forgotten. And you just keep poking

at him, hoping to get a rise out of him, like you can't comprehend that in doing so you are putting your life and those around you in the line of fire."

Chilton coloured with his mounting anger. "Do not presume to tell me what I am or am not doing, you have no idea about anything when it comes to Hannibal Lecter. I know exactly what i'm doing and for all of Hannibal's threats, he wouldn't dare go against me. He wouldn't dare!"

Arrogant fool.

Will was in no mood to argue the point. He stood there silently amidst Chilton's tirade, watching as the man worked himself up into a state.

"Perhaps it's best you don't stay here," Chilton said maliciously. "The job requires balls that you clearly don't have. It would be best if you left now instead of working out your notice with us."

"If that's what you want," Will said, stepping away from Chilton's desk and making his way towards the door.

"I'll send your regards to Hannibal, shall I? He will feel your absence most keenly."

Will didn't give Chilton the satisfaction of slamming the door behind him.

When Will left the building, he didn't say any goodbyes to the other orderlies, to Barney. There wasn't much to say. He had never been very good with those types of things anyway. He didn't walk that long stretch of corridor with the lysol smell to Hannibal's cell. He didn't see that figure in repose, that unwavering gaze directed Will's way.

If he had, Will was sure his resolve would have crumbled into nothing more but dust.

When you have spent a length of time working nights and catching up on sleep during the day, it takes a little getting used to the change to normal day habits. Will spent the first few nights in bed, staring up at the ceiling and counting the hairline cracks in the plaster until sleep finally washed over him in the early hours of the morning.

The days were… long and stretching out before him with very little to fill them. He should start looking for work again, an orderly's wage had replenished his bank balance after the last time he was unemployed, but the money was by no means endless.

The job vacancy section of the newspaper was left on the sideboard in his kitchen, unopened and used as a coffee coaster. Will couldn't bring himself to look at it just yet, the thought of doing so left a bitter taste in the back of his mouth.

Besides, the autumn weather was turning decidedly cool in its slip into winter, the days growing distressingly shorter. Will's dogs were overjoyed to have him with them again for long periods of time in the day rather than him sleeping. As they dashed about him in the wide open yard, Will was either bundled up on the porch veranda with an open book and enjoying the crispness of the air or in his shed where he fixed the older boat motors he had come across in some second hand electrical shops that had been left to pick up dust. It was easy work, hardly troubling to him, but it kept him busy, kept his hands busy, and that was what was most important.

It was when he was idle that his mind unerringly drifted back to the Baltimore state institute and Hannibal Lecter. Will obsessively wondered what Hannibal's reaction had been to the news of Will leaving for good. Hannibal wouldn't have given Chilton the satisfaction of showing what he really felt in his expressions, that would have been a humiliation too far, but Will could only guess at what he had felt on hearing Chilton's crowing.

Would he consider it an act of betrayal? Of cowardice? It made him feel like it was a betrayal for Hannibal and that didn't sit well with him. *I should have spoken to him, I shouldn't have run like a bloody coward* -

Not one day went by where Will didn't think about Hannibal in some way or another. There were odd moments when he caught himself fantasising of a scenario where he and Hannibal had met under entirely different circumstances. Where Hannibal wasn't a serial killer and locked up, where he practicsed psychiatry and was a free man. Their first meeting and how it came to be were not important, it would be their interactions there after that was what counted, what held Will's endless interest. They could be sitting out on Will's veranda right now, taking in the warm sunshine, talking of all manner of topics from the mundane to the entirely bizarre. Conversations that were taken without the impediment of a cell, it bars and the scrupulous gaze of Dr Chilton.

It wasn't healthy to mull over what could never happen, to dwell on such things invited bitter madness.

Will was here in the outside world and Hannibal was locked up for the rest of his life. Will would do well to forget it all, forget *Hannibal.*

If only it was that easy.

One morning, when Will was rooting around in his sock drawer for socks that actually matched each other, his hand fell on the boxed cologne he had bought on a whim under Hannibal's insistence that his usual cologne was awful. He stilled for a brief moment, looking down at it, before pulling it out to get a better look at it. The twang of longing was like a sucker punch to the stomach and he breathed out loudly through the initial shock of it.

For the first time since he bought it, he took it out of the packaging and wore it on his skin. The pang of longing turned into full on want.

Dr Chilton was a man who felt his own self importance a degree higher than he should. His office walls were a shrine to his life, all of his credentials hung in obsidian frames, pictures taken of him with famous and influential figures, and certificates of excellence awarded in his academic career.

Chilton showcased them like badges of honour, receipts to all those who had belittled and degraded him in the past that he was in fact worthy of all attention afforded to him and would continue to do so. This thinking accumulated vanity in Chilton, a sense of untouchability that erred on stupidity.

After all, what human being with a lick of common sense would intentionally poke and prod at a cannibalistic serial killer and think they could get away with it, entirely unscathed?

His greatest vanity would be his downfall, blinded to the realities and the real threat he faced. His manipulations and the idle games with Hannibal Lecter have all been noticed and catalogued and unforgiven. The machinations are to come to an abrupt stop.

But Chilton did not know this. He was blissfully unaware in his office as he finished up on the dreadfully dull paperwork for the day, absently noticing the dying light of the sun dipping lower and lower as the night rushed in to greet him. He wanted to be out of the building by the time the sun had gone down to make it to the dinner he was having with old University friends.

Dr Frederick Chilton would never make it to that dinner.

By the time he put his signature to paper on the last form, Hannibal had escaped his cell. When Chilton, Will and Barney had stripped Hannibal's cell, Chiton had been playing with his fountain pen. That same pen had been completely forgotten on the bed when Chilton had stood up to rail against the passive faced Hannibal and forgotten by all but one.

That one being Hannibal. He now used that pen on the unsuspecting orderly doing cell counts. He got too close to the bars during the count and Hannibal didn't waste a moment. He

reached out, dragging the orderly close and stabbed the sharp nib into the man's neck before using his strength and dragging it across his throat. The orderly let out a wet gurgle, hot blood gushing from the wound and painting the both in red.

He slumped against the bars, dieing in Hannibal's arms.

Hannibal's hand slipped to the orderly's waist, taking the bunch of keys from the belt before carelessly dropping the body to the floor without another thought. On the fourth attempt, Hannibal found the right key and the door swung open for him.

He had barely taken a step out of the cell before the alarm sounded. Instead of cringing away, Hannibal simply smiled. It was alright, Hannibal was a patient man, he could wait and let them come to him.

Within moments, the door to the ward swung open and a number of orderlies came barreling down the corridor with batons and mace spray. Hannibal rolled his shoulders, loosening the muscles there. Finally, some entertainment.

At the sound of the alarm, Chilton jolted. For the first time he began to feel an impending sense of dread. He turned on the CCTV feeds and, with mounting horror, he watched as Hannibal Lecter tore his way through the orderlies like they were nothing. He was the very definition of savage grace, it was mesmerising and equal parts terrifying to watch. None of the orderlies could land a hit, to overpower him. He was a giant and they were nothing more than flies to him.

That dread turned into full on panic and Chilton scrambled up from his seat and grabbed his satchel. He wasn't going to sit around and wait until Hannibal found him to gut him. He had time, he just had to-

Chilton all but sprinted out of his office, taking the stairs down to the foyer two at a time with his satchel hugged to his chest. His breathing was harsh, even with the sound of the siren echoing in the staircase, sweat beginning to trickle from his hairline.

The stairway opened up to the ground floor and a quick glance around showed that no one was between him and the exit. The security guards that normally man the metal detector at the doors must have gone to help.

Chilton made a break for it, rushing across the foyer towards the doors, his heart pounding in sheer exalted triumph, hand outstretched towards the doorknob when-

He was viciously yanked back away from the door, his satchel flying out of his arms as he cried out in sheer terror. His back slammed into the wall, knocking the air out of his lungs, and Hannibal loomed over him in all of his bloody glory.

The front of his expensive suit trousers grew warm and wet as his bladder suddenly expelled its contents.

Hannibal had Chilton by the throat, the grip tight and unyielding as he held him against the wall, Chilton's feet barely gracing the floor.

"Hannibal," He gurgled, eyes bulging. "What are you doing!" Hannibal tightened his grip and Chilton choked on his words.

"Come now, Dr Chilton. We mustn't lie to ourselves. This is a long time coming and I will enjoy every moment of it."

If Chilton had the breath to scream, he would have done. Chilton watched as Hannibal drew the fountain pen, his fountain pen!, up in the light and the nib flashed wet with blood before it came down in an arc and all Chilton felt then was singing agony.

Chapter End Notes

We are coming to the end of Night shift, i deem it one more chapter to go. Thank you to everyone who has ever commented or given kudos, you have been the driving force of

this story!

Chapter 10

Will was out refilling his car with gas at the local gas station when he saw it. The little portable television was mounted on the wall behind the distracted female cashier, programmed for the news channel where a grim faced news caster was speaking before the screen flashed to a mugshot of Hannibal Lecter.

Will stopped in his tracks and the packet of reese's peanut butter cups slipped from his nerveless fingers to land noisily on the linoleum floor at his feet. His eyes were fixed on the screen, drinking in the picture and yet unable to properly take it in. Hannibal's face was never too far from his mind but to see it at an unassuming place as the gas station made the situation seem all the more surreal.

"Horrible, isn't it?" The cashier said to him and he blinked a couple of times, once more becoming aware of his surroundings. "They're saying he murdered his way out of the asylum, that it was like something out of a freak show."

Will picked up the chocolate and handed it over to be rung up. The words didn't want to leave his mouth. "He escaped?"

"Yeah, last night." She rang it up along with his pump number and he paid for it in cash. "It's really scary that he's out there somewhere. Bad enough that he's a serial killer, but he's a crazy cannibal to boot."

The screen changed again, this time with six photographs of men who Will knew the names of. Three of them were orderlies that he had worked with on the Night shift, Barney not among them, two were the security guards on the front desk and the last one was Dr Frederick Chilton himself.

With the news of Hannibal's escape incurring fatalities, it wasn't a surprise that Chilton was among them. Will imagined that Hannibal had enjoyed his death immeasurably and at great length.

Did his death make Will feel guilty?

Chilton's smug condescending smirk and the belief of his infallibility sprung to mind and Will felt nothing for the man's death but pity. Chilton would have easily sacrificed Will in the name of psychiatric research without too much thought. He probably would have slept like a baby too.

"Are they conducting a man hunt of the area?" He asked and she nodded. Despite her earlier admission of fear, she looked excited at the prospect.

"They have the local police out now and some FBI, the same guy who caught him before is leading it."

Jack Crawford, Will mused silently. Will had read about him in conjunction with the capture of Hannibal. He was a heavily decorated detective, having opened the Museum of Evil Minds. Will wasn't exactly in love with the name of it, but it was a very interesting piece.

Hannibal better be well on his way out of the state by now if he hoped to stay ahead of them all..

Will picked up his chocolate and nodded at her. "Thanks."

"Be careful out there," she called after his retreating back. He waved a hand over his shoulder.

Be careful? If only he had taken that advice from the very beginning.

Will didn't know he had spent the rest of the day waiting for something to happen until he heard the creak of the floorboards under somebody's weight on the veranda.

It was late evening, darkness had crept in over the treeline and Will had turned the lamps on to cast a soft orange glow throughout the house. All of the dogs had settled down in front of the fireplace, their soft snoring was a background ambience to Will as he worked on a new fishing tackle at his desk.

Will stilled at the the creaking, fingers freezing in their movement for a moment before he put the fishing tackle down carefully in its box. He had risen from his seat just as there was a low knock at the door. All the dog's ears pricked up but Will made a cutting motion and they stayed where they were, their tails wagging slightly at the change in routine.

Will didn't hesitate, didn't think twice as he unlocked the door and opened it to find Hannibal Lecter standing on his doorstep.

He wasn't wearing the institute's uniform. Will hadn't been expecting him to as he had broken out of that institute twenty four hours before. He had to blend in with the general populace now and so he was wearing an ill fitting dark green polo shirt that practically hung off of his frame and baggy khaki chinos that were an inch too short in the leg.

"Did you take the clothes from the plus size section at Walmart?" Will asked with his eyebrows raised.

Hannibal shrugged. “I was limited to choice and shops are too crowded. I had to take them from the back of a truck when the driver stopped at the side of the road to urinate.”

Will grimaced. “Did you take them from his back or?”

Hannibal’s placid expression morphed into one of distaste. “From the truck, Will. What do you take me for?”

“A cannibalistic killer on the run from the authorities that had limited options,” Will promptly replied.

“Not that limited,” Hannibal informed him before his eyes flickered to the warm room behind Will. “It is customary to invite a guest in out of the dark, is it not?”

Will straightened. “It depends. Does the guest plan on hurting me or my dogs once he is invited in?”

Hannibal’s eyes returned to him and it was like their depths were bottomless. If Will wasn’t careful he could quite easily fall in and never resurface. “You do not have to be afraid of me, Will. I will not harm you or your dogs.”

Will stared at him and knees he was telling the truth. “No lies between us,” he mused.

“Never.”

Will stepped back from the doorway and Hannibal stepped across the threshold.

The dogs got up and padded over to Hannibal, sniffing at his trousers and his outstretched hands, their tails wagging furiously. Hannibal allowed it, his hands upturned so they could each take a turn to scent him.

“They will calm down once they get to know your scent,” Will told him. “They’ve never smelt you before.”

Hannibal looked up at Will. “But they have smelt me on you.”

Hannibal hadn’t worded it as a questions so Will chose not to answer. He didn’t need to anyway, those eyes warmed and Hannibal straightened up from the dogs.

After having taken their fill of Hannibal’s scent, they wandered back to their beds and sprawled across each other.

It was only when Will let the thought of Hannibal being here, in his home, really sank in that he realised how odd this whole situation was. They were talking like they were old friends and Hannibal had come to stay with him on a visit and not the truth of reality.

You should be phoning Jack Crawford, not letting him into your home.

But he didn’t. He knew what other people would have done in this situation, that being the right thing to do, but Will had no real compulsion to do it. In fact, he had the complete

opposite compulsion and he couldn't bring himself to really care.

Hannibal was *here* .

"Would you like to shower?" Will offered instead.

Hannibal's shoulders stretched under the top and Will belatedly realised he had been tense. Hannibal had been dubious of what his reception would be, Will thought.

"I would like that," He nodded. "Sleeping rough has not done me any favours."

Will showed him to the bathroom and the airing cupboard where he produced a soft warm bath towel. "I'll see if I can find clothes that will better fit you."

As Will turned away to leave him to it, Hannibal reached out and grasped his arm. The touch was light, Will could have pulled away if he wanted to.

"Thank you." Hannibal said, his thumb tracing the curvature of Will's bicep before he let him go.

Thank you. Two simple words and yet Hannibal had packed them with so much meaning that Will felt breathless with it. Hannibal was thanking him for more than just a shower and a change of clothes.

I see you. I won't look away.

Will could only nod, the power of speech leaving him entirely but by the look on Hannibal's face, he already knew.

Will left Hannibal before he could do something stupid like ask him if he could share the shower with him. Will let out a breath of relief - disappointment? when the sound of the shower clicked on could be heard.

Will managed to find a pair of loose fitting sweatpants and an old sweatshirt with some old fishing logo on it. It wasn't fancy but it will have to do in the present circumstances. He left them just outside the bathroom door.

He moved back to the living room and stood motionless, unsure if what to do with himself. His eyes lighted on the kitchen and he rolled his eyes at himself.

Food, of course. Hannibal had to be hungry.

Perusing the fridge and his cupboards, he came up with the staple pieces of a bachelor's lifestyle. Pasta, diced pork, mushrooms, tomatoes and onions. He got to boiling the pasta in a pot of water and a pinch of salt. He diced the tomatoes and heated them until they became a sauce before adding the chopped onions to the tomatoes. In a separate pan, he browned off the meat and let it all simmer on a low heat until Hannibal emerged from the bathroom.

Will had no warning until an arm slid around Will's waist and lightly pulled him back until his back hit a broad chest. The hand rested just above his abdomen, the fingers splayed out to touch the most flesh. A chin hooked over his shoulder as Hannibal peered into the pans at what Will was cooking.

"Much better than microwavable meals," Hannibal murmured.

Will forced himself to act normal. "I thought you might appreciate this more than the microwavable mac and cheese i have in the freezer."

"You thought correctly."

Hannibal's other hand came up to Will's chin and tilted his head back. Will knew what was going to happen before it happened and he let it. He wanted it. The feel of Hannibal's lips on his own was like the feeling of coming home and he basked in it. It was gentle, testing, before it grew firmer, more heated. Will made a soft noise in the back of his throat when Hannibal deepened the kiss, lips opening as the tips of their tongues met.

Hannibal' hand at his stomach gripped tighter and Wills's own hand came up to rest over it, lacing their fingers together.

Hannibal breathed in deeply, shuddering, before pulling away enough to see Will's face. "We should probably stop."

Will looked back at him, dazed. "Should we?"

Hannibal smiled, nodding down at the food. "Unless you would want to eat burnt onion and mushrooms?"

Will quickly glanced down at the pans. "You're probably right."

The pulled out plates to dish up the food while Hannibal used the colander to drain off the pasta. Once it was ready, they sat at Will's little kitchen island and ate in a companionable silence that had that charged tension that the aftermath of a fantastic kiss can leave.

"How likely is it that the FBI will find you here?" Will asked after he mopped up some sauce with the last of his pasta.

Hannibal considered the question as he sipped from his water glass. "I would say very likely. Once the manhunt of the eight mile radius around the institution proves fruitless, they will turn to background checks of the staff and interviewing the ward staff. Barney is a good man,

he will point the FBI in your direction out of the concern he has over your safety. You did stir the interests of a serial killer, after all."

"And yet you came here anyway, knowing they could catch you." Will pointed out softly.

Hannibal met his eyes. "You didn't say goodbye. It didn't feel right to end our conversations with silence."

Will struggled to keep the eye contact and lost. He stared at the point over Hannibal's shoulder and swallowed with difficulty. "I met Bedelia Du Maurier at Matthew's funeral."

"Ah." Hannibal said, his tone of voice giving nothing away of his thoughts. "And what did Ms Du Maurier have to say to you?"

"You mean other than the professional curiosity of watching the world burn? She warned me that seeing you for what you truly are would irrevocably change me. Change the both of us."

Hannibal tilted his head, contemplating Will. "And this caused you to run away?"

"Not run away-" Will started to protest, but stopped. It was exactly what he did, there was no dressing it up in a more positive light. Will breathed out of his nose noisily and slumped back in his chair. "Would you believe me if I said I was sorry? That running away only seemed to make me more aware of you? Everywhere I looked, you were there. I couldn't do anything without thinking of you and it was maddening."

When Will finally looked at Hannibal again, he could see pleasure in his eyes. He was pleased Will couldn't shake him off that easily. "It looks like we have changed each other already. You can't rid yourself of me just as I can't rid myself of you. Irrevocable."

"There is no escaping you now, is there?" Will murmured. "You're under my skin and I would have to destroy myself to tear you out."

"It goes both ways," Hannibal assured him and it felt like the two of them in the kitchen were the only people in the world. People like them, perhaps, no others could be so alike and yet so different. There were no pretences here, no walls that need to be drawn up between Will and another. It was intoxicating, life affirming, how could he possibly have thought to give this up?

"What do we do now?" Will asked.

Hannibal spread his hands out on the table. "That depends on you. Baltimore is not a safe place to be, or the United States for that matter. This I can't change. It's up to you if you want to come with me."

Will didn't feel surprise upon hearing this. On some level of consciousness he must have expected it. Hoped for it.

Will considered it, let the words hang between them. "I imagine Barney will have a lot to say about us, about everything that has happened between us. There will be questions about how close we were, would I have aided you in your escape, was my leaving the job planned in

advance. They may consider the possibility of me being an accessory. Jack Crawford will want a scapegoat for the entire mess and I make the perfect target."

"Yes," Hannibal said. "Jack Crawford would be incensed at this incident. His ire will be pointed at everyone he comes in contact with."

Will nodded, like he hadn't already made up his mind from the outset. "It would be in my best interests to go with you. Wherever you are going, anyway."

Hannibal smiled for the first time since he stepped through Will's door. "Vienna or Florence?"

It didn't take long for Will to pack up some of his life into an overnight bag. He had phoned Alana Bloom, asked her to look after his dogs for a time, not letting on that it would be a permanent arrangement. She hadn't been curious about this new situation, there were times when work had drawn Will away from home for a time and she would help out.

It had been a wrench to leave them, they had been his faithful companions since they were puppies, but he knew he was leaving them in very capable hands.

"I have money in offshore accounts," Hannibal had explained when Will broached the subject of how they were going to disappear. "I know a very creative woman that works magic with forged passports and papers, for a reasonable price of course."

"Of course," Will echoed, wondering what 'reasonable' meant to a man like Hannibal. "And when we get to our destination, what will happen then?"

"Whatever we want to happen," Hannibal said and that- that held a world of endless possibilities and it made Will's breath catch in his throat.

"I don't- I don't mean that exactly," Will said, taking his bag from his bedroom and placing it on the sofa. He bent down to the dogs, petting each in turn as a personal goodbye. They knew something was happening, their noses burying into his sweater. "I meant, would you be killing again?"

Hannibal paused, watching Will as he settled the dogs down again. "Are you asking me to stop?"

Will looked up at Hannibal and thought *am I?* "Would you stop if I asked you to?"

Hannibal didn’t answer right away and Will knew the answer was no. Not that he had really been expecting the affirmative, he had asked more out of curiosity than real conviction.

“I can’t promise that,” Hannibal settled on. “Not even for you. But i will promise that it won’t endanger us or indicate us in any way that would cause us undue suspicion. Would that suffice?”

Will didn’t have to like it, killing was killing after all, but it would do for now. His promises were for Will’s benefit alone, and Will doubted Hannibal would have had the same scruples if Will wasn’t gaing with him.

“Yes,” Will said and finally stood, glancing about him for one last lingering look at his home before turning back to Hannibal. “I’m ready.”

Hannibal picked up Will’s bag and hung it from his shoulder before he opened the front door to let Will out before himself.

Will locked the door behind them and posted the key through the letterbox. Alana had her own spare key so he didn’t have to worry about that. It was now full dark and the air was crisp. Will breathed in deeply, savouring the scent of the trees and plants in the yard. A gentle touch at his side brought him back to Hannibal. He leaned forward, brushing his lips against Will’s, a silent enquiry.

Will smiled at him as he pulled back and they descended the steps, Hannibal’s hand low on Will’s back, warm and comforting.

They made it with minutes to spare. Will turned off the engine of the car and dampened the lights. They were parked just off the main road, away from Will’s house but with it still in sight. They had seen the procession of black nondescript cars heading towards the house and knew it was the FBI when they turned into Will's driveway.

A black man in a camel coloured long coat got out of the first car with men in black suits swarming around him.

“Jack Crawford,” Hannibal said. “He won’t be best pleased to find out he was one step behind us.”

“Let’s keep it that way,” Will said and started the engine, pulling away from the curb and leaving the house and the FBI in the rear-view mirror.

To Europe and that endless possibility.

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